

THE TRAIN

BY
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TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
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THE TRAIN

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PART I

Night

CHAPTER I

DANILOV

SLEEP refused to come. Danilov got up, drew back the thick curtain and let down the window. The heavy frame slid down noiselessly. The fittings in the train were of good quality, well made, durable, and pleasant to handle.

A fresh breeze blew in through the window. Sky and fields slipped through the silent white night.

Even the weather was different. Summer had come late that year. In the daytime the sun was scorching, as though it were the South, but the nights were cold. Danilov shivered as he stood by the window. How long had he been standing there? He had lost count of time.

He turned and got into his breeches and topboots. That buxom lady in the white pleated beret had put carpet slippers ready for him again. Fine that would look—breeches with tight legs reaching to the ankles, and then carpet slippers. Would she dress her husband that way, he wondered?

Without a single concession to the lateness of the hour, Danilov put on his tunic and buckled his stiff leather belt neatly. He also took his cap.

Somebody had to set an example, damn that train Commandant.

In the corridor of the staff coach the window glimmered with an ashen light. Sky and fields streamed past, insubstantial, colourless, lost in a nocturnal vacancy. Was the train Commandant asleep? Danilov silently slid the compartment door aside and looked in. The Commandant was sleeping, half-dressed, in trousers and

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socks, his short legs curled up like a child's. His arms were folded, hands pressed to his chin, as though he were saying his prayers.

The door of the adjoining compartment opened. The second doctor, Suprugov, emerged into the corridor wearing a blue hospital dressing gown and carpet slippers.

"Can't you sleep either, Ivan Egorych?"

"Yes. I've been asleep."

He lied because he did not wish to resemble Suprugov in any way. If Suprugov was sleepless, then he, Danilov, should have slept. Or the other way about.

"I've had a good sleep. And you?"

"You know, for some reason or other I just can't sleep. Maybe it's the new surroundings."

"Why new? You're travelling in a train, that's all."

"Yes, but where are we going?" giggled Suprugov. It was disgusting, his habit of giggling. Decent people either smile or else laugh properly.

"We're going to the front, Comrade Army Doctor."

From his splendid height Danilov scrutinized Suprugov. "Pull yourself together, Doctor," he thought, "This is going to be a bit different from receiving patients in your surgery with 'Breathe deeply. Again. ...'"

"Might be finding ourselves in a hot spot, eh?"

"What do you think—Why should we be different from anybody else? Of course we shall."

Suprugov raised a timid glance. Danilov's gold tooth gleamed in the ashen light. Suprugov made a stern face.

"I can't understand it," he went on in a quick, irritated tone. "To send such a train to the front—why, it's pure sabotage. Faïna says that the windows will go at the first blast."

"Faïna? Who is Faïna?"

"The head-sister ..."

"She's called Faïna?" Hair, he thought, the scent of a woman's soft, wet, heavy hair. Damn it, why *must* he remember that? It was almost a quarter of a century ago.

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Yes, twenty-two years exactly. The head-sister has short, tightly curled hair. Faïna, indeed!

"It is pure sabotage—" Suprugov repeated and sighed gravely.

"Well, what do you propose to do?" Danilov's face twitched. Had Suprugov looked more carefully he would have seen the fierce light in his eyes. But Suprugov was busy with his cigarette, which had gone out for some reason—it must have been badly packed.

"Turn it back? Send a wire to Kaganovich, saying: 'Please be kind to the train, it's being sent under the bombs?'" Suprugov understood that he was being made fun of. He felt keenly mortified. After all, he wasn't a male nurse, he was an army doctor.

"I don't propose to do anything. But surely I'm entitled to my own opinion as much as *you* are. I, too, am being sent to my death."

"You think so? So what? But as long as we're still alive, I'll go the rounds, if you've nothing against it."

Sucking at his cigarette, which was going out again, Suprugov followed Danilov with his eyes. The commissar's bearing was dignified and military. Suprugov began to feel uncomfortable in his dressing gown. His own fault, of course. He shouldn't slip into personal conversation. With Faïna, or the other girls, well, that was another matter. But with the commissar—not on any account. Had to be on guard with that sort.

In the general coach the windows were open all along the right-hand side, yet the air was foul. The coach had soon taken on a home-like appearance. Over the girls' bunks hung mirrors, mascots and photographs of sweethearts. Those pictures might be a breeding place for bedbugs. Have to keep an eye on that.

Lena Ogorodnikova was sleeping on a lower bunk at the end of the coach. She was a funny little thing, rather like a boy, who said little but had a mischievous air. Even asleep, she looked as though something were amusing her. A palette-shaped mirror hung over the

head of her bed. Well, a boy could use a mirror too. Opposite Lena lay Iya, her large arms flung wide, breathing heavily and snoring. How could any parents give their daughter such a name? Good girls—every one of them in men's woven under-shirts or singlets, not one in a petticoat or nightdress. The day before yesterday he had discovered Iya sleeping with bare shoulders; he wakened her and then gave her extra fatigues. What kind of conduct was that? Girls should be modest.

The coaches were ready for the wounded. Beds with thick blue quilts smoothed neatly. On the smooth pillows towels folded in triangles.

There was a smell of sulphur, lye, varnish and that peculiar odour that haunts coaches and railway stations and cannot be obliterated either by paint or disinfectants.

These ordinary "hard" coaches were for light cases. A soldier was on guard in each. As soon as the door opened, a dark figure advanced, rifle in hand, cigarette glowing.

It was forbidden to smoke in the coaches, but Danilov turned a blind eye. A man is not a machine. The train was on its way to the front, it bore its red crosses like banners, but nobody in it was under the illusion that those crosses would offer any protection. Each knew that the enemy would make a special point of strafing them.

In the ninth coach Sukhoyedov was on duty, a stocky square-shouldered man with a large head apparently set on his shoulders with no necessity for a neck. He was the oldest man on the train, with the exception of the Commandant. Danilov knew that Sukhoyedov was a veteran of the Civil War, and that during the Finnish war he had volunteered and had been wounded. On June 22, when Hitler launched his treacherous attack, Sukhoyedov appeared at the recruiting station and volunteered for action. But both his years and his health unfitted him for active service and he was assigned to the hospital train. He wore a deeply disgruntled look,

as though cheated of a well-earned decoration. In peace time he had worked in the Moscow coalfields, and the coal dust was deeply engrained in the lines of his face, making the childlike blue of his eyes all the more dazzling.

Sukhoyedov stood by the window and did not come forward to meet Danilov, merely turned his head for a second and beckoned him with his finger. Danilov went up to him. Sukhoyedov looked a different man. Not bitter, not resentful. Like a hunter following the track of a beast.

"Can you see him, over there?" he whispered.

On the horizon, behind the low dark line of the forest, they could distinguish a faint vacillating light. Suddenly the beam of a searchlight leaped into the sky and moved to the right and to the left, leisurely, soundless, not too brilliant. Another one side-stepped, they met, stopped for a moment and parted, groping about in the sky.

"We're trying to find him," Sukhoyedov said sternly. "Can you hear anything?"

"No, nothing."

Sukhoyedov remained silent, listening.

"He's banging away," he said lazily, "Banging away somewhere for all he's worth." And taking his pouch out of his pocket he began to twirl a cigarette.

"Smoke?" he asked, handing the pouch to Danilov. ¶

"No, I don't."

"All the better for you, too," said Sukhoyedov, "It gives you a hell of a cough in the mornings. And the non-smoking soldier has a much easier time of it; a load off his shoulders not to have to bother about tobacco. Don't you get the habit. Once you've got it, it's the end."

Danilov smiled.

"I've lived thirty-eight years without being tempted, I guess I won't start now."

Sukhoyedov raised his eyebrows in childish surprise.

"What, you're thirty-eight?"

"Thirty-eight this spring."

"You look younger." Sukhoyedov said thoughtfully, examining Danilov more carefully, "I'd have given you thirty, well, thirty-two at a pinch. Had an easy life, eh?"

"Easy or not—I don't know," replied Danilov, "but it has been a fine life. I'd live another hundred of the kind and not weary of them."

They remained silent. Then Sukhoyedov said, in a peculiar way: "You won't get killed."

The flares behind the window met once more and stopped in an oblique cross.

Danilov knew himself that he would not be killed. His life could not just snap and stop like that. Everything had just begun, nothing was finished. Only put off for a time. The only thing that was finished was all that business with Faina. Though—who knows what the devil had up his sleeve—maybe he would come across her, too, one day. See her standing with her head thrown back, shaking out the heavy, wet hair. ... "Brush it, Vanya," she would say. ... What childish nonsense, such thoughts, one could not admit them to anyone, not even to oneself.

The coach for light cases was followed by the dispensary coach. The reason for the name was obscure. The dispensary occupied only one small compartment. The remaining section was given over to the dressings compartment, the showers and ventilation apparatus. This coach was Danilov's favourite. At the very first glance he had revelled in its whiteness, its nickel fittings, linoleum, its hermetically closing doors, and the tables and chairs which folded up against the walls. Cleanliness and convenience were Danilov's ruling passion. Jealous in his care of this favourite coach, he passed his handkerchief over the windows, searching for dust. On the first day the dispenser had managed to spill iodine on the spotless, newly-painted table. Danilov had paled with annoyance on seeing the stain. Klava Mukhina, the nurse, ran herself off her feet to preserve the impossible, sterilized cleanliness the commissar demanded.

Now, too, Klava was there in the shower room, standing by a table. Her dark-red head in its coverings of muslin was bent as she gathered bandaging together into a founce. The windows were curtained and a small light was burning.

"What are you making?" asked Danilov.

She turned a freckled, kindly, drowsy face towards him.

"A shade," she said with a weary sigh.

"A shade? For the lamp?"

"No. For the nozzle."

"What nozzle?"

"Of the shower."

Drowsiness made her answers indistinct, but he understood, and was delighted at her idea.

"Aha!" he said. "When the showers aren't in use, you'll put covers on the nozzles to make them look nice, eh?"

"Yes," she answered. "Only it's a pity that it's just muslin. Blue or pink silk would have been better."

"Yes, of course, silk would be better," he laughed. "Only there's none to be had, Klava. But surgical gauze might be dyed with washing blue."

"And then, you know, if there was any red ink," said Klava, looking confidently into his face, "it could be mixed with water and that would colour them pink."

"We'll buy red ink," Danilov promised. "The first shop we come to, we'll buy it at once."

The red-headed girl had raised his spirits. He was smiling as he passed along the rattling corridors.

The coaches designed for serious cases had no partitions and each was as roomy as a hospital ward. White paint. Pendant cots in threes, one above the other, along both sides. Hanging cupboards. Chaises longues. Here, the hospital atmosphere was unmistakable.

The quarantine coach was at the very end of the train. It was an ordinary carriage with the power unit at the rear end. The quarantine coach was the main objective of Danilov's inspection, here, he had a presentiment, something was wrong.

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In this coach no guard met him.

Danilov paused at the door of the power compartment; voices could be heard above the grinding of the wheels, but it was impossible to distinguish the words. Actually, things were quieter than he had expected.

He opened the door suddenly. Nobody paid any attention, only the man on duty, Goremykin, rose; the others remained seated. Kravtsov, the chief engineer, shifted his cigarette to the corner of his mouth, slammed a card on to the table and said:

"Got you, old man."

"Not likely! Clubs are trumps," said Protassov, the coach repair foreman, and placed his card on the table.

Suddenly the young electrician Nizvetsky rose in embarrassment.

All four men, except Goremykin, were highly skilled craftsmen—the most difficult people to deal with. And Kravtsov, in addition, was a volunteer.

"Are you searching for bottles, Comrade Commissar?" said Kravtsov, watching Danilov. "You needn't trouble—they're all gone!"

He waved his hand. His face was flushed, his eyes dull.

Danilov sat down on a stool and pondered. The men watched him in silence, beginning to look somewhat worried and serious. Behind Danilov's back Goremykin stole away guiltily, closing the door carefully behind him. ... As far as he was concerned, everything was clear. Nothing to worry about. The other three, Danilov could put under arrest. Drunk, the sons of bitches. The day before, in Vologda, he had noticed them running about furtively and whispering. ... It would be easy to arrest them. But what then?

"Well, come on, deal!" said Danilov to the pale and alarmed Nizvetsky. "Deal for Fool-With-the-Load."*

He played one game with them, putting all his skill into it, carefully watching the cards, his small, scornful mouth slightly open, showing his gold tooth. He won, and rose.

* A card game where the loser is left with all the cards.

"That's the way to play. Had enough, or are you going on gambling till morning?"

Kravtsov and Protassov were gloomily silent. Nizvetsky said dubiously:

"I dare say not. I could do with some sleep."

"Well, come along then," said Danilov.

Nizvetsky followed him through the coaches, waiting despondently for a dressing-down. But Danilov said nothing and never looked back. He opened doors, and Nizvetsky closed them. The rattle of the wheels sounded loudly as they passed from coach to coach. Now the world lay in complete darkness, the stars had disappeared, morning was near.

In the dispensary coach Klava, sighing sleepily, was trying the cover on the shower.

"Look what she's thought of," Danilov said to Nizvetsky. "Making everything nice. Just wait, she's planning to have it all blue and pink. ... Listen! I want to have a plug-in wireless. The wounded men can listen to it when they're waiting for dressings. Will you fix it?"

"Sure," mumbled Nizvetsky.

Danilov scrutinized him. He was an intelligent looking lad, his clothes were neat, evidently he was used to being well dressed.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "Why weren't you accepted for active service?"

"Piles," Nizvetsky replied, blushing to the roots of his hair.

Danilov was surprised.

"Of all the old men's complaints for you to get! But you wanted active service?"

"I've worked six years on the Moscow-Vladivostok line," said Nizvetsky, excitedly. "I could have remained there, nobody would have touched me. I volunteered for a hospital train. So as to be doing something at least. ..."

"But in hospital trains," said Danilov, "discipline's just as strict as on active service. I'd even go further—what's permissible in a front-line man, is impossible for

us. We've got to be angels. Cherubims and Seraphims, yes. We're Red Cross men and women. ... That vodka, God damn it," he added with restrained passion, clenching his fists, "there'll soon be none of that in this train, take my word for it."

Only a fortnight had elapsed since the war had started, but it seemed like years, thought Danilov.

On that Sunday morning of June 22 he wakened late, and was angry with his wife because she had not called him. He was to spend the day with his boy, and he had wanted the day to be a long one so that both he and the child could get the most out of it. But his wife hadn't the heart to waken him and had shortened this rare holiday.

The boy clambered on to the bed and seated himself astride his father's knees, his clipped head like velvet, wearing his white suit and blue socks. Sunbeams flitted across the well-washed floor. The summer had only just begun, and already his boyish cheeks and legs were sunburned.

"Daddy, are we going?"

He had promised the boy an outing. Promised to get up early. It was his wife's fault that he had overslept. All morning the boy had been fretting. He would be doubting his father's word.

"We'll go, I'll just swallow a bit of breakfast and we'll be off at once."

"Oh, why must you clean your teeth? You're not going to the Trust," said the boy, standing beside him.

While his wife was preparing breakfast, Danilov went out into the garden. They had been living in the town for two years. He was director of an agricultural trust, but his wife could not accustom herself to buying vegetables from the shop and continued to grow her own. This morning Danilov looked with pleasure at the green beds. As he walked among them, he noticed that the tomatoes were coming on, and soon the lettuce would be ready for pulling. His son squatted down and asked:

"Do you think there are any radishes yet, Daddy?"

He recalled himself and his boy at that moment; the

memory was stamped like a photograph on his mind—he, Danilov, standing between the beds, the sunny sky, gay and peaceful, and his boy squatting on his heels and asking:

“Are there any radishes yet, Daddy?”

That was the last moment of his former life, with his son, with restful Sundays, with drifting thoughts of outings and picnics.

His wife came running out on to the porch.

“Vanya, war has broken out, Molotov’s speaking over the radio. ...”

He ran into the house. The wireless was giving out the last of the words that left no room for doubt. Then it fell silent. Danilov raised his head. Everything had changed. The sun shone differently. His house was no longer the same. The faces of his wife and child were different. Years seemed to divide him from that moment of peace and contemplation. And in his mind everything raced away after it.

“Daddy, we’ll go all the same, won’t we?” asked the boy.

He was only four years old.

“No,” Danilov replied, and the little fellow began to cry. ...

That day Danilov went through his papers, wrote a letter to his father, went to the post office and sent the old man some money.

Among his old letters he found a crumpled envelope with the corner of a photograph sticking out of it—he did not take it out, but without glancing at it threw it down in the bottom of a drawer.

He put a photo of his son in his notecase.

That night his wife wept—softly, so as not to waken him. He pretended to be asleep.

She noticed when he stirred, raised herself on her elbow and looked into his face.

“But you’ll get exemption, Vanya?”

He turned away. The question had been settled that morning, when the wireless had spoken. In the morning

he would go to the recruiting office. As for her—she had least of all to say about it. A fifth wheel to the coach.

In the morning he received his call-up papers. Well, all the better. Nobody could say that he had pushed himself forward. He'd been called up, and that was that.

At the recruiting station he was sent to Potapenko, one of his friends, the director of a sanatorium. Potapenko was seated at a bare table, in uniform, his head shaved, looking much younger, and civilians were crowding all round him. Although all these people had only just arrived, and although all the windows were wide open, the room was so full of tobacco smoke that it was almost impossible to breathe.

Potapenko pulled Danilov to him with his warm, puffy hand.

"Aha, you've arrived. Going to claim exemption?"

"No."

"Good, wait a little," said Potapenko.

There was absolutely no necessity for delaying Danilov; Potapenko dealt with men who had come in after himself—but Danilov guessed that his friend wanted to show off a little. He enjoyed having Danilov there still in civvies, while he, Potapenko, was already in uniform, with people coming to him for instructions and assignments. At last he called Danilov.

"Sit down," said Potapenko. "You've served in the battalion?"

"Yes."

"Good," said Potapenko, writing busily in his notebook. "You'll go to a hospital train as Commissar. Stop," he added, anticipating objections on Danilov's part, "I know just exactly what you're going to say. But it's the hospital train for you. It's got to be staffed and you know how to do it."

"I don't. Do you?"

"No," said Potapenko. "It isn't the gods that make the pots, Ivan."

"No," agreed Danilov.

"But here's a booklet with instructions—take it.

Choose your people, we won't quarrel over it—no time for that."

"Who's the train Commandant?"

"Not appointed yet," Potapenko answered. "We'll find one all right, meanwhile you staff the train."

"Where is the train?" asked Danilov.

Potapenko laughed.

"There's no train at the moment. It's in the repair yard. But you get your people together."

"Very good," said Danilov, rising.

At the door he collided with Grigoryev, the chairman of the trade union committee at the Trust where he worked. Grigoryev, breathless, handed him an exemption slip.

"Take it and stick it on the wall," said Danilov, "and tell Merkulov (Merkulov was his assistant) to be at the Trust this evening. I'll be there to hand over to him."

But he didn't get to the Trust that evening. It was not till the twenty-sixth that he saw Merkulov, who had already been officially appointed director by the Commissariat in Danilov's place.

During those three days Danilov had been busy staffing the hospital train. Many people were needed—a surgeon, an assistant doctor, a theatre sister, matron, nurses, orderlies, stokers, an engineer for the power unit, an electrician, conductors, a coach repair gang. ...

Danilov was not the only man combing the town for personnel—at least fifty hospital trains were being staffed, and all were in urgent need of doctors, sisters, orderlies, conductors. ...

Danilov had his own ideas about suitable people, ideas which seemed strange to many.

When it was a question of whom to select—a confident, easy-mannered assistant doctor from the town, lively, vigorous, full of spirits: or a mild, colourless woman of two years' experience in a country district with a youthful, nervous look about her, not too robust—he unhesitatingly chose the woman.

And when that plain, near-sighted, hook-nosed Julia

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Dmitriyevna, swarthy as an Indian, offered herself as theatre sister he did not take fright at her appearance but rejoiced. At the very first glance he knew that she was just what was wanted.

Orderlies he picked from mobilized men. The Red Cross sent girls who had taken a nursing course.

He went to the barracks where people were squatting on suit cases and bundles like a station waiting-room, and called out:

"Any assistant army doctors here? Any dispensers? Comrades, attention! Any dispensers here?"

A smallish woman came up to him; she had a boyish face, a comical mixture of the roguish and the serious. She wore a blue singlet.

"You're a dispenser?" asked Danilov.

"No," she replied. "I'm a physical training instructor."

"We don't need any physical training," he said.

She laughed.

"I know. I'll go as nurse."

"No good," he said. "We need strong people for that."

She laughed again, stooped quickly, seized him below the knees, and raised him from the ground. Only for a second, but she raised him.

"Not bad," he said.

She was standing erect, her breathing untroubled.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Lena Ogorodnikova."

The big difficulty was in finding technical personnel. Electrical engineers and mechanics were snatched from under Danilov's nose. The transport service was reluctant to part with repairmen. "Manage without them," they told Danilov. "You'll be coming to us for repairs, anyway."

The train itself had not yet left the repair yard. They were waiting for the head surgeon to come and sign for it. Suprugov, the doctor, refused to undertake the responsibility.

"I'm only a subordinate, Comrades," he said.

Suprugov was very polite, laughed at everybody's jokes, and pestered people with his offers of cigarettes. One could sense his uneasiness—it was plain that the spirit in this feeble-looking civilian was restless and harassed.

Danilov went to have supper at home and stayed the night. His wife greeted him with silent dismay. There was nothing he wanted to talk to her about. She knew that he now belonged entirely to his new job. So it had been with the Sovhos. The same with the Trust. Now with the hospital train. His soul never lived at home. At home only his son mattered. The wife silently gave him his supper, prepared his bed. His face, in these three days, had become drawn, ugly. At night, unable to control herself, she began to murmur:

"Merkulov got exemption, also the chief quartermaster, even Grigoryev."

"So what?" he would ask with feigned calm, controlling his anger. "Very well, they did, and what then?"

"You have no pity. Neither for me, nor Vanushka, nor anyone. ..."

He turned away.

"That's enough. I want to sleep."

Engrossed in his new work, Danilov had almost forgotten about the Trust, but on the twenty-sixth he found a couple of hours to spare and went to hand over to Merkulov. He turned into the familiar street, where he saw the notice board with the gold-leaf letters: "State Dairy Farms Trust." He noticed the crack in the lower right-hand corner, which had been there when he had come to take over the work. The familiar staircase, the rattle of the abacus in the counting house, the crackle of an adding machine. The door on the left, covered with black oil-cloth. ... His door. His Trust.

After handing over to Merkulov, he went round the offices and said goodbye to everybody. The old cashier wept. It was pleasant to find her so moved. Her face distorted, she said:

"And they've taken our car, have you heard? Merkulov's going into the country to-morrow by train, can you imagine it?"

Everybody regretted his departure, except Merkulov. Danilov noticed that Merkulov was even overjoyed. Not just because he sat in the director's chair of course—he wasn't *that* type of man. But getting his own way, feeling free. ... Had Danilov interfered with him?

After leaving the Trust, Danilov called on Potapenko. He found an old man of about sixty standing beside him, telling him something with much gesticulation.

"Here, let me introduce you to your train Commandant ..." said Potapenko. "Dr. Belov."

Danilov looked at the Commandant. Not very promising! Short, insignificant, with a small thin face. The train Commandant had not yet had time to change into uniform. Those neat trousers, those cute little boots, oh, dear! What in the world was he to do with him?

But aloud, Danilov said, encouragingly:

"Don't worry, Comrade Commandant, we'll get along famously!"

The Commandant carried a small suitcase to which were attached a pair of felt boots and a kettle. He had just arrived from Leningrad.

Quite unexpectedly he responded in a cheerful, almost belligerent tone.

"Well, after all, you know, nothing else to be done—we'll just go and fight!"

"Together," said Potapenko, looking at Danilov with pleasure.

"That's right, together," said the old man.

Danilov invited him home for the night. The train commandant tripped along jauntily, flapping the rubber mackintosh which was flung over his crooked arm. Danilov took care of his suitcase with all its encumbrances.

"Why have you brought felt boots?" he asked. "Surely we'll be issued with them?"

"Well, you know, I've never been in the Service," the

commandant replied. "And you hear all sorts of things. Some say they'll be issued, others say they won't. And one lady, you know, said that there won't be enough felt boots to go round, and who'll get them first? Not the medical corps, that's clear. My wife packed them. ... Just in case, eh? They can stand somewhere under a shelf, they won't be in the way, eh?"

"Of course not," smiled Danilo.

At the supper table the train Commandant ate and drank with a good appetite, and talked about Lenin-grad's architecture, while Danilo looked at him and thought:

"What in the world are we going to do with you?"

Next morning Danilo set out to find an electrical engineer—otherwise his complement was full—and the Commandant went to the repair yard to sign for the train. After telephoning to the yard, the evacuation office and the station, he told Danilo complacently:

"You'll find me at the station with the train."

Danilo's quest took him to the local engineering works. The previous evening the manager had agreed to release engineer Kravtsov, provided Kravtsov himself was agreeable.

Danilo had no illusions concerning the manager's generosity. He obviously wanted a good excuse to get rid of Kravtsov. There must be something queer about the man. Danilo made enquiries at the local trade union. The replies were evasive; Kravtsov was a highly qualified engineer deserving all praise, but. ... well, we all have our weaknesses, haven't we?

"Does he drink, or what?" asked Danilo.

"Well, that can happen to anyone," was the reply.

Kravtsov's assistant was at the diesel engine. Kravtsov himself was having lunch, sitting on an overturned box with a bottle of milk in his hand. He had the lean, ascetic, stern face of a saint. A warm draught from the engine stirred a grey lock on his brow.

"Well, what about it?" asked Danilo. "Will you serve on the hospital train?"

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Kravtsov placed the bottle on the floor and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. His unflinching, stern glance summed up Danilov.

"On the train?" repeated Kravtsov. "Under it, for that matter! Only get me out of here, I don't want to spend another day in this hole."

"How's that?" Danilov asked kindly. "Don't you get on with the people here?"

"You know what, Comrade Commissar," said Kravtsov. "Let's get things straight. I'm not a boy. Is that understood?"

"Quite," said Danilov.

"I've trained all the diesel men in this town. And I don't need boys from the Youth League to be giving me reprimands."

He rose, and thrust his small, oily hands into the pockets of his greasy overalls.

"In the newspaper that is stuck on the wall—Kravtsov. At meetings—Kravtsov. An official reprimand—Kravtsov. I've no use for all these grouzers—I tell you frankly. They yell that I'll get under the wheels when I'm drunk. Me—under the wheels!" Kravtsov gave a wicked laugh. "But you just ask them—has there ever been even the slightest hitch in our power supply? ... Look here, would you say I'm drunk now?"

"Just a bit tipsy," said Danilov cautiously.

Kravtsov shook his head.

"Not just a bit, but well and properly soused right now. And after lunch they'll be coming to smell my breath and make remarks. ... Take me to the devil himself in hell, Comrade Commissar, that is, of course, if you're satisfied with me."

The two men looked one another hard in the eyes. The eyes of both were cold and assured.

"I'll take you," said Danilov.

After fixing up Kravtsov, Danilov went to the station. On the main line, beside the long grey fence, stood a shining new train—fifteen dark green coaches with red crosses, one freight car and a small yellow refrigerator

coach. A Red Army man with a rifle stood by, on guard.

The Commandant of the train was in the staff coach. He was walking about the corridor rattling his keys, a huge heavy bunch slung over his left elbow. The sun streamed in through the windows, and there was a smell of fresh paint. The Commandant's face was creased and shining with happiness and perspiration.

"Look!" he said, showing the keys to Danilov. "For all doors, all hearts."

"Everything in order?" asked Danilov.

"Why, what do you think!" said the Commandant. "I've just taken her over from the commission."

"And you examined everything yourself?"

"I. ... Why—yes."

Danilov looked at him searchingly, and the Commandant's eyes dropped.

He had examined nothing. He had been given the bunch of keys, had signed a receipt, and climbed into the staff coach. A locomotive had been attached, and the Commandant had departed, amusing himself with the thought that he was travelling alone in the seventeen coaches. The train drew up before a grey fence. The locomotive whistled and left, and the train Commandant began walking up and down the corridor, impatiently awaiting Danilov. ... He had already taken a liking to the commissar.

Danilov himself inspected the train. It turned out that everything really was in order. Or at least, so it seemed. There were some items he did not understand. For example, what was that zinc box divided into two compartments with the folding lid in the kitchen coach? Above the box were taps, shelves and hooks. Danilov stood for a long time wondering what it could be for. He called Sobol, the quartermaster, and together they guessed that it was for washing dishes.

People were arriving, and the train began to look inhabited. Lorries drove up with sacks, linen, medicaments. Danilov and Sobol counted, examined, and

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disposed of everything. Julia Dmitriyevna, the theatre sister, avidly seized bundles of bandages and cotton wool, and carried it into the dispensary. The dispenser spilled iodine on to the table. Both she and Julia Dmitriyevna immediately donned white overalls and tied white kerchiefs round their heads—and everybody at once felt that it was impossible to enter the dispensary without an overall. The stokers tested the kitchen stoves and filled up with coal from the station. The girls made the beds, sang songs and looked at Bogeichuk, the handsome sergeant. Quartermaster Sobol, Bogeichuk and others left for the Distribution Centre to stock up with food. Lena Ogorodnikova led the way back, small, light and upright, carrying a sack weighing about a hundredweight on her shoulders.

Danilov gave orders for the rice, condensed milk, chocolate and butter to be locked up separately. For the staff supper he ordered porridge.

The hospital train left for the front. It moved slowly from station to station, sometimes shunted on to sidings for half a day and more. It was overtaken by trains carrying troops and munitions. It made way for them and then followed, unhurried and unchanging.

At stations it was shunted on to the side lines, away from the bustle. On the platforms people ran about, said goodbye, cursed, kissed, wept, and waved handkerchiefs. ... They looked at the hospital train in grim silence as it passed by, spick and span, with its red crosses and white curtains.

One night the train was approaching Pskov.

Returning from his inspection, Danilov passed through the general coach. Suddenly a violent jerk threw him sideways, knocking his forehead against the corner of the upper berth. The wheels grated. The train stopped.

"What's the matter?" a woman's voice asked in consternation.

"What's happened?" Danilov asked, stepping out on to the platform.

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The conductor, shining his torch, came walking along through the train.

"Red light," he explained as he passed. "Line's blocked."

The beam of a searchlight stabbed the sky, dazzlingly bright against the dense blackness. Silently it streamed across the inky sky, slowly, feeling to right and left, seeking and not finding.

CHAPTER II

LENA

TEN months before the outbreak of war, Lena Ogorodnikova had married.

An amateur festival had been arranged in a suburban village, with singing, dancing, recitations and acrobatics. The local sports council had sent Lena.

A lorry was fitted up with seats, and Lena took her place on the back bench of the uncomfortable dusty machine. The places at the sides were occupied by people from another organization, whom she did not know.

The strangers wore leather overcoats or raincoats and carried brief-cases, while Lena was wearing a blue jersey that she had taken in at the sides to make it fit snugly to the figure. The sleeves were rolled up over her elbows. Now she would have preferred them to the ends of her fingers, but felt awkward about pulling them down. She sat there alone, away from everybody, tossed from side to side with every jolt. The wind caught her loose hair and lashed her face with it.

The men were talking loudly and laughing about something. Nobody took the slightest notice of her.

It was a hot, sultry day. A heavy purple cloud crept up over the horizon, rose higher until it had covered half the sky, and without even waiting to obscure the sun poured down a torrent of rain. A sheet of water blotted out everything. The blue jersey, the skirt, the loose hair were drenched in an instant, while rivulets streamed down Lena's face and back. The men had drawn their coats and waterproofs over their heads and could be heard shouting from beneath them. The driver, in his closed cabin, was undisturbed. Lena, soaking wet, thought to herself: "What brutes they are!"

Suddenly one of the men got up. Stooping under his coat, he crossed over to Lena and sat down beside her.

"Let's share this," he said, and drew the corner of his leather coat over her head.

She found herself in a small tent with him. She had to huddle close, so as to be under cover, while the down-pour drummed on the coat.

She was so cold and wet that she did not feel the slightest awkwardness. She was only angry that help had come so late. He had taken his time over it, the idiot!

Her head was level with his chest. Looking down, she could see only her own wet knees pressed together with her skirt stretched as tightly over them as a tarpaulin cover, and a corner of the checked lining of the coat.

Suddenly she heard a loud, slow beat right by her ear. A heart beating. His heart.

Surprised, she listened. It had not been beating like this all the time. It had been beating of course, but not so that you'd notice it.

Now it was beating so that you would notice it.

She wanted terribly to see his face. After all, she did not even know what he looked like. Perhaps it would be better if—no, whatever he was like, let it go on.

And go on beating it did.

Without moving, she managed to insert two fingers in the opening of the coat, made a tiny slit in front to let in the light, and then, cautiously turning her head, looked up into his face.

It was shadowed, frowning, disturbed. Black eyes looked down at Lena.

She dropped her head quickly and did not raise it again. And now there were two hearts beating beneath the leather coat.

Closing her eyes, she listened to that thunder, that drumming—in herself and in him.

A warm tumult suffused her—shame, and gladness in the shame, and pride, and surprise, and triumph.

The rain stopped, and he got up.

"Well, here we are," he said, smiling with some embarrassment. "It looks as though we're arriving. ... But you stay like that for the present!" he added hastily,

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and drew the coat over her shoulders. "You'll catch cold. ..."

But she felt sad sitting all alone. She threw off the coat and began wringing out the hem of her skirt. The hot sun was again shining upon her. The water in the lorry was ankle-deep. There was a smell of earth, wet growing grain, steaming wormwood; wonderful air. And his face was wonderful too. And the rain had been wonderful—only why had it stopped so soon—it should have gone on and on.

They had arrived. And seeing nothing but what was within her, forgetful of the acrobatics, of her soaking clothes, she got out of the lorry.

Until then, Lena had never loved anybody.

There had been no object for her affection. Life had carried her past people, past things, past homes. She had never had her own family, her own room. Even her name had changed several times. Her mother had christened her Valentina and called her Valya. In the children's home there had been six Valentinas, and they had called her Tina, to avoid confusion. As she grew up, she became tired of the name and changed it to Elena.

She hated to look back. At six years old she had an operation for appendicitis in the local hospital. After coming out of the anæsthetic in the children's ward, she felt very bad; bitter saliva choked her, there was nobody to wipe it from her lips, and she felt she could not call anybody. The other children had their mothers with them—it was visiting day; Lena was hidden behind a screen. "Keep quiet, it's not hurting you a bit!" said the stout nurse, when Lena groaned. She stopped groaning. She heard somebody on the other side of the screen ask:

"Whose child is that?"

"Nobody's," replied the nurse. "She's from the children's home."

It had been bad when she lived with her mother.

Her mother drank. As soon as there was any money, vodka and salt pickles would appear, other women would come from somewhere, and there would be drinking, singing and laughter and good advice would be administered to her mother:

"You should lodge a complaint against the swine. If he is such a swine you should lodge a complaint. That's all."

Lena saw the "swine" once or twice. Her mother would take more care about her dress and bring her to the market square, to a small black-marketeer's shop. By the shop, right on the street, stood a large stove where pieces of mutton on a skewer were being grilled and crackled lusciously. There was a table in the shop with salt and pepper and a plate with peeled onion. The "swine" was the owner of all this. He cut the meat, grilled it and swept the floor. Lena and her mother sat down to the table and ate the mutton, removing bit by bit the pieces from the skewer. The fat poured down Lena's hands. The boss sat down too and wiped the sweat from his forehead with a none-too-clean apron.

"Eat," he said to Lena, with a sigh, "Eat, this is a soft one," he would add, handing her another skewer. He was not young, he had yellow-grey whiskers and a wooden leg. Her mother, also drenched in fat as in tears, said:

"It breaks one's heart to see some children all nicely dressed and this one, winter and autumn without shoes—and no worse than they are."

"Eat, here is a tender bit," the boss murmured, helping her on her plate. "What am I to do with a house chock-full? My step-daughter has arrived with children, the tax inspector has been and God alone knows how I'm to pay the taxes. ... The mutton has gone up in price, the clients are poor. I'm darned if I know what to do."

"You should have thought of it before and not go about seducing people," her mother said.

The boss sighed heavily and muttered as if to himself:

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"If you could produce proofs, we would talk differently."

"Heavens!" her mother said, pressing the mutton to her breast. Lena listened to them and looked at the pepper. She kept looking at it all the time, but was afraid to ask.

Before leaving, the boss gave her mother some money, they went to the fish shops and her mother bought some herrings, then fetched the vodka and again a crowd gathered at home and sang and drank, and her mother, red in the face, shouted:

"I'll show him, the scoundrel, the proofs, he'll learn what it means to be a seducer, the blasted degenerate!"

"Lodge a complaint, that's what you should do," the choir responded. "You give them a finger and they ..."

Lena's mother was a rag-picker. Sometimes she would disappear for two or three days, and one day she returned with a man. They had supper and went to bed, while Lena was put to sleep on a couple of chairs. In the morning Lena awakened, went up to the bed and began examining the visitor. He was sleeping on the outer side, his thick arm hanging almost to the floor. There were blue veins running down that arm, and the fingers on the hand were covered with thick black hairs down to the knuckle. She took up a stick and hit that horrible hand with the blue veins. But the hand never stirred.

At dinner time the mother rose and went to the shop, and then she and the visitor sat down to eat. Lena was given half a glass of beer and some jelly. From the conversation she realized that her mother intended going away somewhere, and felt delighted. At first the beer made her giggle, then she felt drowsy and fell asleep where she sat. The next day her mother took her out and showed her a two-storey white plastered house.

"This is where you're to go," she said. "Go straight in, all by yourself. Say you're an orphan, no father, no mother, all alone."

The mother baked cakes, laid the table, and there was another great feast. She danced, still untidy in her new

silk blouse, and then sat down at the table again, her chin propped on her hands.

"My fate, my love ..." she said. "And who should blame him? The other brute refuses to accept what belongs to him. Why should this one pick up the leavings? If the son of a bitch were to pay my alimony, but all he does, the swine, is to try and get away with mutton, as though I were a fool. ... I can have more children, after all."

"You will, you will, Pasha, never lose hope," the visitor shouted and she got up and danced again in her blue blouse, that stood out on her like the bark of a tree.

Lena soon became tired of the noise and stamping. She put on a torn, knitted cap, her only one, which she wore winter and summer. She took her toys—an empty polish tin and the handle of an awl. Quietly, unobserved, she went out and marched straight to the two-storey white plaster house.

"I'm an orphan," she told the two tall girls with bobbed hair standing at the gate. "I've neither father nor mother, I'm all alone."

The girls said nothing, but looked down at her seriously. Lifting up her face, she repeated the words she had been taught. Then one of the girls asked:

"How old are you?"

The second turned to her companion.

"Let's call Anna Yakovlevna."

Lena peered in through the gate, and saw a garden with swings and green grass everywhere.

"I'm an orphan," she repeated gaily.

Anna Yakovlevna came, took Lena by the hand and led her into the house.

Grown-ups surrounded her and began asking her who had told her to come here and where she lived. She was so small that they had to seat her on a table so as to talk with her conveniently, but she was too clever for them.

"Nobody told me," she replied, swinging her legs. "And I don't live anywhere."

She realized that they wanted to send her home. But

what she wanted was to remain in this house with its swings and the green grass.

"I'd like to live here," she said frankly.

The people laughed, and a man in gold-rimmed glasses said:

"We must inform the militia."

She spent the night in the house, sleeping with the cook, who bathed her and cut her hair. That evening and the next morning the big children played with her. There were no small children in the home.

As she bathed Lena, the cook said indignantly:

"A mother like that—I'd bash her face against the wall. ... What's she been thinking about, to let the child get covered with vermin?"

A militiaman arrived. The man in the gold-rimmed glasses called Lena aside and warned her that she must tell the militiaman the whole truth, otherwise things would go badly for her—he'd take her to the police station.

"All right, I don't mind," Lena replied. "I don't mind a bit, and I'm not afraid of a militiaman."

And she told him too that she was an orphan and had nowhere to live.

"But what does your mother do?" asked the militiaman.

"She collects rags," said Lena.

Everybody burst out laughing. Nevertheless, the woman who collected rags and had a little girl called Valentina was not to be found; she had already left, and Lena was handed over to a home for young children.

She spent a year there. She was a well-behaved child, not the least capricious, and got on well with people. Without special affection for anybody, demanding nothing, she could put up with anything. She took what was given to her with pleasure, but without gratitude.

She soon became accustomed to being cared for and found nothing surprising in the fact that people fed her, clothed her, and taught her to read, that some women

would wash her clothes and prepare her meals, while others would clap their hands in front of her, singing:

“With our little feet
We go tap, tap, tap;
With our little hands
We go clap, clap, clap. ...”

Besides that they would sing *Enemy storm-clouds rage above us*, and *Arise, ye prisoners of starvation*. Lena regarded singing as a necessary duty.

A year later the home was reorganized, and Lena was transferred to another place, in a different town. There the winter was longer and colder, and the stoves were heated with wood instead of coal, but otherwise things were much the same.

She was growing. The little girl Valya was something belonging to the past, to the long-ago, she was somebody else now. This girl was known as Tina. She had a place to live in but no home. She had friends but no family. She enjoyed care, but no tenderness. She was neither hurt nor caressed.

She carefully did whatever was asked of her—she did not like being scolded. When she was seven years old, a new head was appointed to the home, a member of the Youth League.

“No more of that,” he said, on hearing the song *With our little feet*. “You’re going to make idiots of the children. They’re pretty idiotic now. What they need is physical training.”

The gymnastics lessons just suited Lena, she was the strongest and most agile of all the children. She was praised, and that was pleasant too. From then onwards, she tried to do everything so as to earn praise.

In the 7th Form the pupils were instructed in the Constitution. The teacher would read out an article of the Constitution and then laboriously explain that this article was good and just. Lena kept looking at the

teacher and wondering: "Why is he trying so hard to explain something that's perfectly clear?"

Lena was already in her fifth children's home, she was a member of the Youth League, she was studying at a physical training course, and was called Elena. Again the teacher was talking about the same thing, but this time from another angle. ... He was proving that the Soviet state is the most just in the world. ... No other state existed for Lena. She was a child of that state. It had been her home, her land, her sky. To any person in that land she could say comrade. From anyone she could take bread, and with anybody she would share it. She went without diffidence into any factory or office, and so long as the talk was official, businesslike, she was self-confident, clever and resourceful. But if it turned upon herself and her personal affairs she became shy and reserved; she was not accustomed to that kind of talk.

Twice she had just escaped becoming too fond of somebody.

After finishing the course, she became a teacher of physical training in a railway school, and went to live in the railway hostel.

The secretary of the district physical training committee was a girl—Katya Gryasnova. Katya had foolish, kindly black eyes and cheeks like hams. She herself had nothing to do with physical training, and from her sedentary life in the office she was rolling in fat. She had the greatest admiration for Lena.

"How on earth can you live in a hostel?" she said. "No one there to serve you, nobody to look after you. ..."

She invited Lena to her home, and Lena went. Katya's mother had a three-roomed cottage, kept a cow and had a garden with fruit trees. They drank tea from a samovar, under a cherry tree. On Katya's bed there was a pile of embroidered pillows and cushions, her mother's handiwork. Lena gazed longingly at these cushions.

"Yes, you're very comfortable here," she said with an involuntary sigh.

"Stay with us," said Katya. "We'll be like sisters. Pay what you like. Our cow's a good milker, you'll put on weight. Because you're like a skeleton."

"Yes, do stay with us, Lenchka," said Katya's mother. "Katya's so fond of you. It's not good for a young girl, living in these hostels. You never know what may happen to you."

The mother was a quiet, gentle soul, with fans of tiny lines round her eyes, which were as kindly as Katya's.

Lena took up her abode with them. A bed was arranged for her in Katya's room, and Katya shared her pillows with her friend. Lena drank milk fresh from the cow, and life became comfortable and easy. But it didn't last very long.

There was a young man who was in the habit of visiting Katya; a friend from childhood days. He was an assistant book-keeper in some office or other, and in the evenings would play his mandoline in the garden under the cherry tree. Lena had no time for him—he was not interested in sports; she couldn't even have told the colour of his eyes.

One evening, upon coming home, she found Katya in tears.

"Why, what's the matter?" she asked in genuine sympathy.

"Nothing," Katya replied. She wiped away her tears, and sat there sullenly, without looking at Lena. Katya's mother was grumbling audibly in the next room.

"A very fine thing, I must say—to act like that towards people who've been decent to you."

"What's the trouble?" asked Lena.

"If folks are kind to me," Katya's mother continued, coming into the room, "then I feel I ought to act right by them and not in that sort of way."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Lena, who hadn't the faintest idea what it had to do with her.

"We've treated you like one of the family, Lenchka,"

said Katya's mother. "And this is the thanks we've got; it's beyond me, in my day a young girl would never have behaved like that."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," said Lena. "I haven't done anything."

"Now don't you try to make excuses, my dear. It's always the woman who's to blame in these cases. A young fellow—he's like a calf, where you pull him, there he'll go."

"You don't mean to say," asked Lena in astonishment, "that you think I'm in love with Katya's fiancé?" She burst out laughing. "I've never given him a thought."

"Nobody says that you're in love with him, my girl," replied Katya's mother. "But since he's in love with you, I must say that I don't think you've behaved very well."

Katya laid her head on the table and sobbed.

"I don't know anything about it," said Lena, a ring of anger in her voice. "He can go to the devil for all I care, what possessed him to pick on me?"

"That's just the question, what possessed him? A young fellow, doesn't drink, good-looking, earning good money. ..."

Lena went into the room she shared with Katya and lay down on the bed. People are all right so long as you don't get too close to them. Now all that she wanted was to get out of the house.

Katya came in, sat down and put her arms round Lena.

"Don't be angry with my mother," she said. "I know it isn't your fault. All men are brutes, that's all."

Lena remembered the "swine" and his mutton. She laughed. Katya kissed her, proud of her own generosity. They went into supper and Lena drank her milk. She thought to herself—"I've had enough of this. I'll go."

A couple of days later she received a long love-letter from Katya's fiancé. She tore it into fragments and returned to the hostel.

The second occasion was six months before she married.

The ground floor of the hostel served as the men's quarters. Up above, on the women's floor, everything was clean and tidy; shining aluminium saucepans stood on the stove, and a bright-blue kettle. The men fried eggs, and heated water to shave in enamel mugs, black with smoke. They scattered cigarette ash on the floor. Lena avoided having anything to do with them.

One day, as she was passing along the lower corridor, one of the men called to her.

"Comrade," he said in a deep baritone, "excuse me, but have you a thermometer?"

"What sort?" asked Lena, stopping.

"An ordinary one, I want to take my temperature," answered the baritone. "I feel feverish, but I haven't got a thermometer."

"Just a minute, I'll ask," said Lena, and went upstairs.

One of her room mates had a thermometer, Lena went down with it.

The baritone was waiting trustfully where she had left him. He thanked her and asked in which room she lived. A quarter of an hour later there was a knock at the door.

"Thirty-nine point four," he said, as though she had enquired. "Bother the thing, just can't get rid of it."

"What's the trouble?" asked Lena, who had never had an illness in her life except appendicitis.

"Malaria."

He hung about the door, evidently reluctant to go. His face was long, thin, hook-nosed, inspired.

"And my quinine's finished," he said, dropping his head in a martyrlike way—like pictures of Christ saying "Not my will, but Thine, be done." "But I'll go to the chemist's at once. I'm used to going about with any kind of temperature," he added with a wave of the hand.

It was winter, with 22 degrees of frost outside.

"Give me the prescription," said Lena, "I'll go."

"Oh, but why should you?" he said.

"As you like," she replied.

"It costs one rouble twenty kopeks," and he gave her the prescription and the money. His fingers were very long and thin. He held the little finger poised as he extracted the coins from his purse.

She brought him the quinine and gave him tea with lemon. She felt sorry for him.

They soon became friends. Every evening he would come and knock at her door, and when he felt ill, she would go down and look after him. He told her about himself—he was an engineer. She was surprised—she had not thought that engineers lived together with train conductors in hostels.

"I used to have a fine apartment," he explained. "I left it to my wife."

He had had two wives. Both of them, according to his story, had left him. Their way of leaving him was strange—the apartment and furniture remained for their use, and the deserted baritone changed casually over to a new, bachelor life. He had had children by his wives.

"Delightful girls," he said, sighing.

"But how was it," asked Lena, "that you couldn't get on with either of them?"

He began whistling. He whistled quite well, not in the least like street boys. "That's part of Chaikovsky's Fourth Symphony," he said, when he stopped. Then he asked Lena if she liked poetry, and recited Asseyev's verses: "No, you are not dear to me, lovers are not like you." The verses moved her; she had never heard anything of that kind before, her acquaintance with poetry being confined to the seventh-class reader. He, on the other hand, knew an endless number of poems, and could recite them at any time, day or night. They began sitting up late together. She felt a thirst to see him and hear him recite. ... But once, in his room, when he had been reciting *The Gipsies* and ended with the last lines: "And always passion brings its doom, from fate there's no escaping," he continued in the same beautiful voice:

"I love you," and covered her mouth with his wet lips, smelling of tobacco. She sprang up and pushed him away with such force that his malaria-wasted form struck against the door.

"Drastic," he said, after a short silence.

She rose, drew herself up, clenched her little fists, then with a quick light step went past him and out of the door, without vouchsafing him another glance.

Back in her own room, she rinsed out her mouth. But that was not enough for her. She proceeded to clean her teeth. She felt as though she had swallowed something foul.

And then love came.

There had never been such love.

"Kiss me. ..."

Nobody had ever kissed her like that.

"Sleep, little one. Is my arm comfortable round you?"

Who had ever been cared for like that?

"Kiss me. ..."

For the first time in her life she had her own home. It was only one room, but look at all the things it contained: a wardrobe with a mirror, a nice folding table, a writing desk, a divan and chairs! And in the kitchen there was her cupboard with pots and pans and crockery. And all this belonged to her, and she belonged to Danil, Danya, Danka—the loveliest name in the world! For twenty years she had belonged to nobody and now she walked happily arm in arm with her lawful spouse.

She thought him quite elderly—he was already twenty-eight. She was glad that he was not too young—it seemed to lend weight to her too.

He loved to bring her presents—she was so pleased and happy about every trifle. "I've never had such shoes," she said. "And I never had such a frock." And deeply moved he would answer: "Darling, you ought to have a dozen frocks like that. ..."

Even ordinary chocolates she ate with such enjoyment that it was pleasant to watch her.

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When she was busy about the house, she always put on a large apron, and looked as though she had never done anything else except housekeeping.

Life was one round of bliss. Love had transformed Lena; her walk, the very carriage of her shoulders had changed. Her voice had taken on a low, cooing note. Her eyes had narrowed and darkened. She radiated light and happiness, people turned to look at her in the street, and that only increased her pride and joy.

Ten months passed. Ten months, three hundred days, three hundred nights.

He was called up at once.

It was a dreadful day. For the first time she saw that something other than herself held the dominant place in his life.

He moved about the room, gathering odds and ends together, replying to her absent-mindedly. ...

She was not hurt or offended. It was simply that she saw this side of him for the first time, possessed as he was by masculine affairs. He had not yet gone, but he no longer belonged to her.

She covered her face with her hands. Had he behaved otherwise, she could no longer have loved him.

No, that was not right—she could never have ceased to love him, but her pride and happiness would have been dimmed. She was a sportswoman, an Amazon, a winner of contests, she understood such things. One can only feel triumph and pride in victory over the strong. Was there any honour in gaining victory over a weak heart? He had a strong heart. She was proud of him.

She had to do something to make him realize that she understood. So that he should depart, satisfied with her.

First and foremost she must conceal her despair. He was fully master of himself—simple, calm. He cracked jokes. She could do the same.

And then she must help him to pack. She was sitting there with folded hands like a visitor. There he was,

stuffing a shirt into his haversack, and she remembered that it needed a button.

"Just a minute, Danya, I'll see to that. ... "

She took his underwear out of the haversack, examined and mended everything. She made up a parcel of food—not too much, he told her. She remembered his shaving gear. And boot polish, and a brush. She packed envelopes, paper, matches.

He sat there and watched her packing his things. That was as it should be—the man resting and smoking, while his wife got him ready for war.

And when the packing was done and he went up to her and embraced her for the last time, she laid her head on his shoulder and looked into his face with a new feeling—an infinite nearness and tenderness that wrenched her heart.

She was his sister, his mother, just as she had been his sweetheart. She was everything in the world to him.

She accompanied him to the station and parted without tears.

"What will you do when I'm gone?" he asked.

Smiling apologetically, she replied:

"I haven't even thought of that."

He looked at her with a twinge of alarm.

"You won't do anything crazy, eh?"

"No ... not too crazy ..." she promised.

"Darling, please, no romantic heroics. War's a grim business, got to be waged soberly."

"Don't worry, there'll be no heroics."

They kissed fondly for the last time, and after that words failed them. He entered the coach, and she left the station in a daze.

Oblivious to her surroundings, she returned home. The room was littered with things. ... All of it useless, if he was not there. How long would the war last? Two years, he had said. Two years! When without him, not a single minute of life was of any value. The loneliness would kill her. How should she fill her life? She would suffocate.

She sank down on to the floor among the open suitcases and scattered linen. Her face was ashen, her eyes full. Even her lips were grey. But then a smile curved those lips, she raised her eyes and they were shining. She would follow the same path as he.

She rose, took off the dress in which she had seen him off, and put on an old blue jumper, darned at the elbows. One key she would hand in to the house committee, the other to Katya Gryasnova, and ask her to keep an eye on things. Nothing for her to do here. Just put everything away—suppose he returned before her? She cleaned and tidied the room, locked the door of heaven behind her and directed her steps to the recruiting office.

Danilov liked Lena.

"A fine girl," he said about her. "She can carry a man single-handed."

And Lena liked Danilov. Not so much Danilov himself, as his name. The others called him Comrade Commissar, but she always said Comrade Danilov. She liked the sound of it, it reminded her of her beloved: Danil, Danya, Danka.

Danilov assigned Lena to the dispensary coach; he thought she would be quick and skilful in laying patients on the operating table. But Julia Dmitriyevna, the theatre sister, said to the train Commandant:

"Comrade Commandant, you must give me another nurse."

"Why, what's the matter?" said the doctor who was always obliging with everybody. "Don't you like her?"

"No. I don't."

"H'm," said the doctor. "You know, I felt, too, that she was a little—you know?"

Julia Dmitriyevna compressed her thin lips, straight as though drawn with a ruler.

"Yes, just exactly that."

"Not just the thing, eh?"

LENA

"Flightiness written all over her," hissed Julia Dmitriyevna.

"Yes, yes, yes, flightiness, yes. ... Very well," said the doctor, nodding authoritatively. "I'll consider the matter."

To Danilov he said:

"What about sending another nurse to the dispensary, eh?"

"Why?" asked Danilov. "Don't you think Ogorodnikova will be able to manage the work?"

"No, hardly. The sister and I thought it over—it'll be too much for her. She's light, light. We need someone sturdier there."

Danilov did not argue—a medical man should be the best judge. He sent Klava Mukhina to the dispensary, and brought Lena into the Krieger coach.

Lena fussed about all day, making sure that everything was spick and span. Dust constantly kept settling on the windows or the varnished shelves. She was rather hurt at having been removed from the dispensary. Of course, she owed it to that red-faced beast, the theatre sister. Ugly creature she was, no two ways about it. Probably nobody had ever loved her. Serves her right. Why did she want to get her knife into her, Lena? Well, Lena's coach would be the cleanest of all, just to spite her. And she went about all day with buckets and mops, wiped the windows with newspaper as Katya's mother had done, and aired the blankets. ... Flies, flies, where did they all come from! No food in the coach, not a single human being, but one fly had already flown in, and another after it. ... Lena stalked the flies. One she caught, the other got away and took cover somewhere. Lena could not find it. Klava Mukhina made shades for the lamps out of gauze, decorated with numerous flounces. Lena envied her—she could not make flounces. She wanted to make friends with Klava, ask how it was done, but Klava was in the dispensary day and night, and Lena avoided that coach as much as possible, so as not to meet Julia Dmitriyevna.

THE TRAIN

Always, wherever she was, she felt her husband close to her. True, she could no longer talk to him as she used to and study every movement to please him, she had too much to do; but not for a single moment did she forget that he was there and every now and then addressed herself to him. "There, that's it, Danya," she said absent-mindedly, as she plumped up the pillows on the beds and stood back to admire her work. "And now we'll just wash the floor once more!" she told him. It was only when the time came to rest that she plunged deep into that gay, tender world that held only him, her and their love.

But there was precious little time for that world. She would be called into the kitchen to help peel potatoes, or there would be a lecture on personal hygiene by Dr. Suprugov. In the morning Danilov summoned the entire personnel to read them the latest communiqué, to explain what barbarians the fascists were, that our reverses were but temporary, that in the end the Red Army would be victorious and the Hitlerites smashed. ... Lena listened to Danilov and thought: "Why do you have to talk so much about it—I know myself that we'll win, Danya and I, it can't be any other way, because otherwise it would mean that they'd kill Danya and kill me, and we'd never be happy again. ..." She was not unduly alarmed that the Germans were taking town after town. Another town captured—well, it couldn't be helped. In any case they'd be pushed back again. Only let it be soon, so that the old life could return quickly, so that Danya could come back. She had not yet had any letters from him, but she felt that he was alive.

Lena slept soundly, disturbed neither by Danilov's inspection rounds nor the bumping of the train. When she woke up, it was already getting light. She had had a wonderful dream just before waking.

She lay there, smiling in her dream, eyes closed—and in the same moment, before opening them, she remembered—none of it was real, she was in the hospital train,

LENA

on the way to fetch wounded, and the train had stopped—was it possible that they had arrived?

She jumped up and leaned out of the window; she saw a railway hut, meadow and forest; birds were already singing in the trees, and the sunrise glowed in the east, rosy and airy—it brought tears to her eyes, it was so beautiful! And fluffy little clouds all over the sky, like rosy down—she had never seen such a sky. ...

Another stop. They're in no hurry about us. ...

She had risen early, and the others were still asleep. There were still two hours before reveille. She could lie there and gaze out of the window—perhaps she'd have another lovely dream. ...

But there was Danilov, he was already up and about, coming out of the kitchen coach. Lena put on a skirt and left the train, barefoot. It was a fresh morning, the birds were now in full throat. A lilac bush in the hedge beside the hut was thick with blossom—no leaves to be seen, only the huge bunches of flowers. ... Lena wanted to pull a branch, she began making her way to the hedge.

"Heh, Ogorodnikova," Danilov called to her. "Get back we'll be starting any minute. You'll be left behind."

Lena pursed her lips. Starting! You'd think it was an express! Couldn't she jump on when it was moving! As she broke off the branch, fresh drops sprinkled her face.

The train jerked into motion. Danilov and Medvedyev got in. Lena purposely waited, standing on the lines, warm wind from the passing wheels fanning her bare legs. When the last coach drew level with her, she seized the handrail and swung lightly on to the step, which was knee-high. Standing there, she felt very pleased with the agility of her jump, with her strength, with the pleasant breeze fanning her forehead and shoulders. ... "See that, Danya," she said, "see what a girl you've got. ..." And having given him enough time to admire her, she went into the coach.

CHAPTER III

DOCTOR BELOV

IN Leningrad, the hospital train pulled into the Vitebsk goods-station. A locomotive had been promised within an hour and a half, but two hours had passed, and there was no sign of it. Meanwhile, Dr. Belov was pacing up and down beside the headquarters coach muttering:

"This is terrible ... terrible. ..."

But he was not referring to the delay. From Vologda the doctor had telegraphed his wife that the train would be going through Leningrad, and asked her to meet him at the station, but he himself had only known that morning at which station they would stop. And now she was not there. The suspense was terrible. And the worst of it was that she might have come already, she might be walking about that scorching labyrinth of rails looking for him. There were dozens of trains here, thousands of coaches, she would never have time to find him before the engine came and they had to go. The doctor was in a ferment. Several times he thought of going to seek his wife among the other trains. Once he had already left the coach, and then was seized with apprehensions—suppose the train left without him? Of course, he could overtake it. But what would Danilov say? The doctor stood in some fear of Danilov.

At that moment Danilov himself came up and saluted. It was the first time he had seen Belov that day. In the morning there had been a meeting of the Communist Party members to elect the Party organizer. Julia Dmitriyevna had been chosen, and Danilov had voted for her because there was nobody else, but now he was feeling worried and dubious. For all her masculine traits Julia Dmitriyevna was still a woman, and the Party organizer would certainly have no easy time with Dr. Belov. In his own mind, Danilov put the matter in

his way: it was necessary to make a train Commandant out of Dr. Belov. How could weak female hands deal with a matter like this?

Danilov saluted the doctor, pitying him in his heart. Here he was, walking about in the stifling heat in full uniform. The breast pockets of his tunic were stuffed out till they looked like squares of iron—what in the world could he have in them? Under the shining peak of his cap his shining nose jutted out; trickles of perspiration were running down it. The doctor was baking like a sun-scorched roof.

"It's hot!" said Danilov.

"Unbearably," replied the doctor. "I can feel the heat of the gravel even through my shoes."

Danilov looked down curiously—so this was called "gravel"? He liked to know things like that. These old intellectuals were always using foreign expressions.

"Where on earth have they brought us?" the doctor continued. "This is like a railway jungle. I'm an old Leningrad man, but I'm hanged if I know this place."

Danilov made no reply; what difference did it make where they were standing? The important thing was to move and get to their destination. He knew nothing of the Commandant's suspense, he did not know that the Commandant was ready to cry like a child.

"Ivan Egorych," said the doctor, "are you on good terms with your wife?"

"What do you mean?" asked Danilov in surprise. "She's my wife; what sort of terms could there be?"

"No, but you know," said the doctor, slightly embarrassed, "I just wanted to ask you ... well, it's this way, sometimes people live together for thirty years, but there's no real friendship—it's that way sometimes, isn't it?"

Danilov looked away.

"Sometimes, of course. ..."

"And sometimes it's just the opposite," said the doctor, and suddenly his face shone, lit up with tender-

ness, pride, shy triumph; Danilov's amazement was complete.

Rounding the rear coach of a neighbouring train, a tall grey-haired woman—she topped the doctor by a head—was crossing the lines. She wore a plain grey dress and a black straw hat of the fashion of twenty years ago.

"Sonechka," said the doctor weakly. "I thought you weren't coming. Ivan Egorych, allow me to introduce my wife. ... Sonechka, this is Ivan Egorych Danilov, I'd be lost without him."

The woman looked into Danilov's face and held out her hand. From the other hung a huge string bag bulging with parcels.

"Come, I'll show you my compartment," the doctor mumbled, beside himself with happiness. "You're alone. ... Give me the bag. ... Well, of course you're alone. ... Always alone, always. ..."

"Igor's digging trenches," the woman replied, following him. "And Lyalya couldn't get off from work. I've brought you your mittens, Nikolai, you forgot your mittens."

"Just look at that, like a young fellow," thought Danilov, as he watched the doctor help his wife into the coach. There was a deep red weal on her hand from the thong of the heavy bag, a wrinkled, pale, thin hand.

The ventilator was humming in the compartment.

The doctor and his wife were sitting on the divan, hand in hand. The parcels from the string bag were on the table.

"Sonechka, have you thought, we're sitting here just as we did on the evening before I left, remember? And remember how I said then that it might be the last time? And now here we are, sitting together again, eh? And that was only ten days ago, eh? You know what I think? I think that we shall be sitting together, many, many times more yet. What do you think?"

She kissed his damp, salty forehead and said tenderly:

"And I think so too. Only give me some water. Cold, and plenty of it."

The doctor jumped up and seized his head.

"My dear, forgive me! I thought of nothing, as usual! You're quite exhausted! Wandering about in that jungle! Looking for me! Good heavens! ... Here's a water bottle, just a second, only it's warm, unpleasant. ... "

There was a knock at the mirror-backed door. Fima, buxom and rosy in her white beret came in coyly with a tray containing a coffee-pot, biscuits, and a jug of fruit juice with ice floating on top. Another face peeked over Fima's shoulder—everybody was curious to see the Commandant's wife.

The doctor brimmed over with happy laughter.

"Sonechka, that's Danilov! I assure you that it's Danilov! What a man! Fima, who sent that, Danilov?"

Pouring out the coffee, Fima replied in official tones:

"The quartermaster instructed me to say that pork cutlets will be ready in ten minutes."

"Sonechka, don't drink your coffee yet. First eat the cutlets. That's Danilov, of course, not the quartermaster. He gives us nothing but millet porridge, not another thing. ... I didn't even know that we had pork. That's Danilov wanting to impress you. What a man? Ah, there's a man for you! ... Fima, bring in the cutlets, bring them in, bring them in. ... "

His wife wanted him to have some with her. It was too hot, she said, for warm fat. She couldn't eat it all, he knew quite well that she couldn't eat so much. ... He refused, but when she held out a piece to him on a fork, he swallowed it delightedly. No, it was wonderful, wonderful luck that she should have found him!

"But how did you find us? I'd never in the world have been able to do it. ... I'm talking nonsense, my dear, please forgive me. What was it I wanted to say. ... Yes! You won't be sent to dig trenches?"

"No. They're not sending me."

"But of course, of course. Your health. ... "

"Nobody is sending me. I'll go of my free will."

A quiver passed over her face.

"They're beating us, oh, how they're beating us, Nikolai. ..."

He looked at her, confused.

"Beating us—but not for long."

"Oh, I know it's just for the moment! I've seen a man from Vilna. It's so awful. ... I don't want to talk about it. Ask me something else. What was it you were going to ask me?"

"Lyalya and Igor?"

"Lyalya's working. People say that they're going to be sent off too in a few days. Igor has left with the first lot."

"Where?"

"To Pskov."

She burst into tears. He dropped her hand and looked at her in horror. She had never cried in the old days. He remembered how he had sometimes felt twinges of jealousy—she always seemed to put her son first. The boy was nothing to be proud of—lazy, rude, always away from home, running about, God knows where, and the doctor had resented her readiness to forgive the lad anything, the way she kept saving tastiest portions for him, and put their daughter second. But now he understood—she had intuitively felt that there was a special destiny awaiting the boy, the destiny of war; hadn't she often said: "Don't worry, he'll finish school, serve his time in the army, and all that'll be smoothed out." She had known he'd be going with the first group to dig trenches; that was why she had loved him best and spoiled him. ...

"Sonechka, don't cry," said the doctor. "Why, he's not been killed yet, dear, no need to cry like that!"

"I'm not crying about him. I'd go myself, if it wasn't for my work. I'm crying because I can't bear to listen to those communiqués."

Yes, her work. He had not asked anything about her work.

"At work everything's the same. Sometimes it makes me angry—times like these, and people bothering about false teeth. One fool of a woman brought some gold. She had two white metal crowns, and wanted gold ones put in. I just couldn't keep it back, and I told her: 'A fine time to be bothering about changing your teeth!' She took offence and went to look for another dentist. Let her go, the fool."

"Let her go," he repeated mechanically.

They fell silent, and for a long time sat there looking at each other with their kindly tear-stained eyes. A white skin formed over the coffee in the cups, they had forgotten all about it. They had also forgotten the fruit juice.

Another knock at the door. Danilov entered with an apology, and told them that the engine was just being coupled on.

"What's that?" asked the doctor. "Already? That means we're going, Sonechka. ..."

Danilov went out, to let them say goodbye undisturbed. Then the doctor's wife left. She walked across the lines—tall, stooping very slightly, her grey hair showing under her old black hat. The doctor stepped along beside her, small, but with an added manliness from his uniform—seeing her off.

Before the war the doctor had kept a diary. In the depths of his heart he felt sure that he had literary talent. After all, there had been writers who were doctors—Chekhov, Veresayev. Well, he might not be a novelist, but a publicist, like ... "Marat," Sonechka had suggested one day, when he had confided these ideas to her. The doctor had taken offence at her levity and had not told her about the diary, but wrote in secret. He felt especially afraid of his children finding out. He had no idea that his wife and daughter, unknown to each other, used to take the book from his drawer and read every word of it.

One pleasant thing about writing was that every small event gained added importance, sometimes even a kind

of magnificence, when put in literary form. If ever the doctor chanced to show some acquaintance in an unpleasant light, he never used the real name, but replaced it by letters of the alphabet, such as NN, X, or Z. He did not want the people who came to play Preference with him to be disgraced after his death, when his diary would be discovered and published.

When he left home, he had placed the diary in a folder, fastened it with string and sealed it with wax.

"Sonechka," he said, holding out the package to his wife in both hands. "I beg you to take care of this and open it only if ... You understand. ..."

After his wife's visit to the train, he again felt the urge to write. He opened a thick, virgin exercise book, sniffed its oilcloth cover with pleasure, sighed and wrote:

"July 2, 1941, Sonechka came."

And suddenly all desire to write left him. The train was running and it was cool in the compartment. The ventilator was humming. ... Here was the place where she had sat, in the corner. Had she managed to catch a tram, or was she still waiting? ... The doctor's head sank on to the exercise book and he sat there for a long time, without moving.

"A strange man, NN," the doctor wrote next day, having regained mastery of himself. "I understand I. E. Danilov, I understand our nice, though rather grim, theatre sister. I understand that girl in the beret who looks after me and is so pleased if I praise the way a table-napkin is folded, I understand that drunkard Z, I understand everybody in the train, but NN I cannot understand at all. And yet he is the man who is closest to me here, or at least, he should be the closest. We are men of the same profession, we could find enough to talk about for hours, but for some reason I have no desire to talk to him. He presses cigarettes upon me, he is all politeness, but there is nothing behind that politeness. I talked to him about current affairs; he used the same words that we find in the official newspaper

reports. I talked about professional matters; he agreed with everything I said, even when I purposely talked nonsense. I asked about his family; he is a bachelor, and lives with his old mother. It appears that he is a bibliophile, he has a whole library in his compartment; when I asked him to let me read something, he was confused, stammered and stumbled, promised to lend me a book and has given me nothing. One can't call him a misanthrope; he mixes with people, but he makes them do the talking while he agrees with everything. I can see that I. E. does not like him."

The doctor filled his pen, remembered how the writers of old novels described their heroes, and concluded:

"There is something about him which is mysterious and repulsive."

Faïna, the head sister, also found Suprugov mysterious. But not in the least repulsive. Oh, no! It was just this touch of mystery that attracted Faïna.

"Doctor," Faïna said to Suprugov, nudging him with her warm shoulder. "What are you thinking about all the time? I want to know. Do tell me."

Faïna was half a head taller than Suprugov, plump, blooming and effusive. Perhaps under other circumstances Suprugov might have found her attentions flattering, but now he was in no mood for them.

Suprugov was afraid. That was the whole secret.

He was frantically afraid.

Suprugov's speciality had been a quiet one—ear, nose, and throat, his patients had been children with adenoids, and deaf old people. Suprugov would look important, he would anoint, clean, cauterize, but he knew that deafness would not hinder a person from living another twenty years, and he had not that deep feeling and respect for human suffering that one finds in the surgeon, the pediatricist, or the village doctor. Suprugov was not accustomed to the sight of suffering and death. His patients went through no torture; they knew discomfort, but not agony, and when they died, it

was from some other cause which did not concern Suprugov. ... He was very well satisfied with such a quiet practice. He took the greatest care of his own health, and treated every trifle. Once he had a gathered finger; he always remembered it with a shudder—that had been terrible! His mother had been surprised by his groans.

“Does it really hurt so much?”

She was a care-free old woman who had borne seven children and buried six. She had had her share of sorrow and pain, but even at the age of seventy her eyes still held that fiery spark which was absent in Suprugov's. She had become somewhat foolish with age, was passionately fond of playing cards and going to the circus, and was careless with her house-keeping, but in general she and her son got on excellently.

Suprugov collected books, sculptures, china and Palekh work. In his study he had cabinets filled with Chinese porcelain and Venetian glassware. Not that he possessed any great understanding of Chinese porcelain, Palekh work or the poems of Verhaeren, he simply liked lovely things, and beautified his rooms with them. He attended all meetings to which he was summoned, with exemplary punctuality, saw new plays, paid visits, listened to the radio, read the newspapers, and subscribed to special publications; but what he liked best was to sit at home smoking and looking over his collections.

“If you'd only get married, Pavlik!” said his mother, coming home about midnight. “You're always alone, sitting there by yourself.”

But he had no wish to marry. He'd no use for women, and limited himself to compliments. He had heard enough about unhappy marriages, divorces, family troubles. ... And venereal disease? Heaven forbid! After all, was he really so much alone? Most of his time was spent with other people. ... Once upon a time, when he was still quite young, he had been in love. He had had two romances, and what came of it? Both had

ended most unpleasantly. ... Enough, he wanted no more of it.

"I'm not satisfied with you," said his mother frankly, looking dubiously at him. He kissed her soft white cheek, laughing. Poor Mama, she was getting old and childish. What could she find unsatisfactory about such a son? He supplied her with everything she wanted, even tickets for the circus. And after all it was he who had raised them from straitened circumstances. His father had been a salesman in a boot shop, and now here he was Pavel Suprugov—a doctor, an intellectual, a connoisseur of art. People said that the Soviet régime had opened all doors. ... But a man had to have a head on his shoulders, all the same.

He was thoroughly well satisfied with his life.

Was he equally well satisfied with himself? He would have found it hard to give a definite answer to this question. If anything, he was not. There was something wanting about him, some lack of force, but what, he did not know. He could never order, he could only request. Others commanded, and found willing obedience. How was it that so-and-so could command? Why was he obeyed?

Why could he, Suprugov, never command? And if he did venture on it—people did not jump to obey him, they were only surprised. ... Why was it that other men could argue, while he always had the irresistible urge to agree even if his mind was opposed? It was only when he got thoroughly excited that he ventured to stick to his opinion, and then only so long as nobody raised his voice. ... Why was it that other people could be blunt and outspoken to each other without offence, while he, Suprugov, was wounded by every trifle?

In order to avoid unpleasantness, he always tried to be as polite as possible, offered everybody cigarettes, and whenever he could, oiled their palms.

Others strode through life like masters; he hesitated on the threshold like an uninvited guest. Why?

He could not understand it.

For that matter, he tried not to think about it. After all he was very well off. He had everything he wanted—a good sound profession, an assured position, a spotless reputation, not to mention those charming hobbies that added beauty to his life. What more did a man need for happiness?

From the first day of war, the world was turned upside down. Everything went to the devil—certainty, peace, security. Here was a man accustomed to listening to life like a violin played on the other side of a wall; now it was beating a drum in his very ear.

He was mobilized! And with his poor health! What of it—he could be assigned to a hospital train. But he was no surgeon! He could not probe for bullets and lay on plaster of Paris! ... That would be done by other folk; he would convoy the wounded and look after them on the way, see that there was no illness, that their health improved. And he need not worry—if necessary, he would even learn to extract bullets. ...

But he did not want to be maimed! He was afraid of bombs! Afraid of suffering!

"You'll have to fight, Pavlik, there's no other way!" mumbled his mother, shaking her head, as she packed his things. He did not tell her of his terror. In those days he felt that he hated her. He hated everybody. Why did they pretend that they were not afraid? They knew as well as he did all about high explosive bombs, dum-dum bullets, mustard gas, and of the brutal cruelty of the enemy. How dare they pretend that they were not frightened! How dare they laugh, talk about every-day trifles, eat ice-cream and go to the theatre when inside them everything was one long scream!

But it was as though they had all agreed to keep up the pretence. They did it so well, he almost believed them. So he had to pretend too, and he pressed his cigarettes on people, talked about trifles and tried not to betray himself. But at night he could not sleep. The train was on its way to the front. Suprugov smoked endless cigarettes, and grew greyer. Dr. Belov talked

about his former cases. Faina flirted with him. The electrician Nizvetsky came for medical advice. Suprugov replied politely to all of them, but inside him a panic-stricken animal was howling.

Sobol, the quartermaster, was tormented with doubts—should he explain the whole state of affairs to the train Commandant or leave it to time to justify him, Sobol, and expose Danilov?

It was not Sobol's fault that the people on the hospital train were fed on millet porridge and consumptive-looking dietetic soups. Those were Danilov's orders. He had told Sobol:

"Listen. You just forget that you've got meat, butter, cocoa and delicacies of that kind."

"For ever?" asked Sobol. "Or perhaps we can remember them sometimes?"

"I'll tell you when it's time to remember them," Danilov promised him.

On the fourth day in the train, Dr. Belov said to Danilov with some embarrassment:

"There's something wrong with the food, you know. The people are grumbling. We'll have to stir our quartermaster up a bit."

"The quartermaster's going along the right lines," Danilov answered. "We don't know how things are going to be in the near future, where we'll get supplies, and what kind, and how much. And we shall have wounded men to feed."

And fumbling with the toe of his polished top-boot, he concluded:

"I consider that Sobol is perfectly right."

"Yes, yes," the doctor hastily assented, embarrassed by the thought that Danilov might take him for an egoist and gourmand. "Yes, of course, we don't know where we'll get them or what they'll be. Sobol's right. ..."

Everybody grumbled at Sobol, beginning with the quartermaster's assistant, who received the millet Sobol weighed out in the morning, and ending with Kravtsov.

The latter did not condescend to any personal conversation upon the subject, but sent a message through Kostritsyn that he would smash Sobol's face if he didn't stop his damned nonsense.

That was when Sobol thought of going to Dr. Belov and making a clean breast of the whole thing. He realized full well that Kravtsov was not a man to fool with. Sobol began to haunt the doctor—he felt safer under his wing. Belov would see him several times a day—he was amused that Sobol was always busy reckoning up. Rolling his eyes, Sobol would count under his breath:

"Sixty-seven times a hundred and twenty, that's 8,040 grams, say roughly eight kilograms."

He was no expert with the abacus, and multiplied and divided in his head.

But Sobol could not make up his mind to approach the doctor. He was far from sure how the commissar would regard such an attack. The commissar had cold eyes, and thin hard lips. He would not strike a man in the face, of course, but who wanted to be on bad terms with such a chap?

"Schemer," Sobol thought of Danilov.

He found a way out. Choosing his moment, during the dinner in the staff coach, he took a tin of meat paste, cut off a slice of butter and shook out some sugar. "After all, what am I to do?" he whispered. He counted the lumps of sugar—forty-two. "He'll be getting too fat on that," thought Sobol and put back twelve of them—the biggest. Then, concealing everything in his pocket, he went to Kravtsov.

Kravtsov was asleep in the car, lying on the top berth. A newspaper covered his face—only his beard could be seen sticking out from under it ... Sukhoyedov was sleeping down below. Nobody else was there. Sobol cautiously nudged Kravtsov.

"Comrade Kravtsov!" he whispered, when Kravtsov removed the newspaper from his face and looked down at him with sleep-fogged eyes.

"You're wrong to be angry with me, it's absolutely not my fault."

"What do you think you're doing?" asked Kravtsov, sitting up on the shelf and regarding the supplies which Sobol was spreading out on his knees. "God, what do you think I am, a baby, to suck sugar?"

But appeased by Sobol's effort at conciliation, he forgave him.

Sobol felt easier in his mind, he even began to enjoy a feeling of importance. He began for the first time to joke with the women.

"'Ah, knight, Faïna was her name,'" he said, meeting the head sister in the passage.

Danilov, on hearing this, asked:

"What does it mean?"

"I'm least of all to blame for *that!*" said Sobol, raising both hands. "Pushkin wrote it."

All this time the war was grinding on; the enemy was advancing into the heart of the country, his motorized troops were racing along Russian roads, his aircraft were flying over Russian towns.

"Have you noticed?" Dr. Belov asked Danilov. "Our people are laughing. Joking. Just as though there was nothing wrong."

Danilov nodded.

"Well, that's fine."

After a moment's thought, he went on:

"It's a good thing they can joke. What's not so good is that they have no conception of the size of the calamity. Stalin spoke about it, but all the same they can't grasp it sufficiently. Here in the train, it's as though we had been locked up in jail, but without loss of civic rights."

The doctor remembered Sonechka, and her tears.

"Do you think—the suffering is so enormous?"

Danilov laughed grimly.

"What's there to think about? It's so obvious." He spoke slowly biting his lips—the very words hurt him.

"The end's a long way off. Can't even see it. It's just begun yet. ..."

"Our people, you know," said the doctor, "they'll make any sacrifices."

"What do you mean by sacrifices?" asked Danilov. "Sacrifices are made to some one, aren't they? You don't make sacrifices to yourself. What you call sacrifice, that's the people's natural reaction, yours, mine, that of these girls here. For our people, gallant deeds are no sacrifice, but just an every-day thing. For us all to go on living as Soviet people, some of us may have to die to-day. Suppose they kill me, you, Petrov, Ivanov. Is that a sacrifice? But in that case, to whom are we sacrificed—I, you, Petrov, Ivanov? You must excuse me, maybe I don't express myself very clearly. ..."

"No, I understand you very well," said the doctor, "and I'm inclined to agree with you. But I don't concede you the heroism. I'd rather say there's no heroism, nothing but some kind of natural reaction. Heroism—you know—that's human splendour, a soaring flight of the human spirit, and it's not everybody that is capable of it, it needs special qualities."

"Qualities can be developed," said Danilov. "And in this war they'll develop in such a fashion that the world will hold its breath. Those are not qualities that the good God hands out to people, they're formed by training, surroundings ... conditions," he said, his eyes gliding angrily over the compartment, cramped as a box.

The doctor shook his head. He did not agree with Danilov, he felt that this was putting it all too simply. If Danilov was right, then anybody could become a Hero of the Soviet Union.

"In our country," said Danilov, "it's possible to make a hero out of anybody."

"We have a population of two hundred million, if I'm not mistaken," said the doctor. "How about that, two hundred million heroes?"

"Quite possible."

"Two hundred million minus one," said the doctor

jokingly. "You'll not make a hero out of such an old sack as me."

"Two hundred million minus one," said Danilov. "Two hundred million minus Suprugov."

They both laughed. The serious conversation had ended in fun.

Since his wife's visit, one thought haunted the doctor.

He might concentrate on matters connected with his work, he might think about the situation at the front, about Suprugov, about Sobol, he could eat, sleep, write his diary, talk, joke or be annoyed—all the same, that thought held him fast and from time to time would tighten its grip as if to say—feel me! Don't forget!

This was the thought of his son.

In the evenings when the doctor was alone, he would take off his uniform that made him so hot, put on his striped summer trousers and lie down half-clothed. There might be a raid, and he couldn't run out in his underwear, with women all around!

Stretched out on the wide velvet-covered divan, he would close his eyes. And immediately his son was sitting beside him, and they were talking. (Once upon a time it used to be the other way round; the son would be lying in bed, tumbling about and playing, while the doctor sat beside him and tried to make him go to sleep.)

"Igorek," said the doctor. "How did it happen, dear lad, that we came to lose each other?"

He was a lovely little chap, he thought.

When he was two years old, he climbed up the ladder left by some men doing repairs, and made his way to the roof. The children playing in the yard called Sonechka, she looked out of the window and saw Igor sitting on the very edge, dangling his legs. Sonechka gasped, she felt faint ... A neighbour climbed up after him, but he jumped up and ran towards the chimney; he was caught, he screamed and kicked—he did not want to come down.

The neighbour said he ought to be well spanked, to teach him not to go climbing about in such places. But Sonechka only kissed her boy, and when the doctor came home and heard about it, he did the same; just think—a toddler of two years old. ...

It was a year later, he thought, that time we were walking along Karpovka—they lived there then, in Writers' Street. He was holding one of Igor's hands, and Lyalya had the other. She was seven, no, eight at the time. Suddenly a dog dashed out of a side street and began barking. Lyalya dropped Igor's hand and hid behind her father's back, but Igor pulled away, ran up to the dog and began barking back at it—Bow-wow! And the startled dog turned tail and ran back again. ... He was not yet wearing trousers, he had a blue frock and a pinafore, and his hair was wavy like a girl's. ...

A brave boy, a splendid boy!

Danilov said that courage comes from training. Perhaps, perhaps. But who had taught courage to that two-year-old Igor? No, that was something different. Perhaps there are two kinds of courage—one acquired, the other innate.

Not that it mattered, after all. What was important was that Igor, his son, had been plucky from the day he was born. And not only plucky. Sensitive, fine ... altogether quite unusual. ...

"We'll have wash day to-morrow," people would say at home. "We must buy some soda, we'll have wash day to-morrow."

And the next day the woman came to wash, so Igor decided in his own mind that her name must be Wash Day, which was what he proceeded to call her—Auntie Wash Day. He would hop about beside her and peer into the tub—all full of froth and bubbles!

Once Wash Day brought her little girl, who was three years older than Igor. The child taught him to play naughts and crosses, and Igor adored her, he hugged and kissed her all the time. Sonechka began to be jealous, and asked:

"Whom do you love most, Lida or me?"

"Lida, of course," he replied.

But later on, toys began to disappear. Sonechka said nothing, she did not want to make her son unhappy. But at last she had to speak.

"Igorek, Lida's not a good girl," she said. "You're so fond of her, and all the same she steals all your nicest toys."

He said nothing, but went into the dining room, sat down on the big divan with his legs tucked up under him, and stayed there for a long time. His eyes, as Sonechka said later, were full of surprise and grief.

Then he slid down from the divan, went to Sonechka and said:

"Don't say that she's stolen the things. Let's say that I've given them to her, shall we? And let her keep on coming."

The next time Lida came, Sonechka heard Igor say to her as soon as they were alone:

"Take my toys if you like. Take anything you want. All of them. I don't want them."

What a boy, what a boy. ...

When he was six, he took some money from his mother's purse, without telling her. He had beautiful curls, pale gold. Sonechka was proud of them and would not have them clipped. He begged to have them cut off, because the other boys in the yard used to tease him and call him a little sissy, but Sonechka, with maternal vanity and egoism, replied:

"Don't take any notice of them, they don't know what they're talking about. Keep them for another year, just one year more!"

Suddenly one day he disappeared from the yard, and turned up again, his head clipped and smelling of eau-de-cologne.

"Where did you get that done?" asked Sonechka, staring wide-eyed at his face, which seemed suddenly to have become plainer and coarser.

She was ready to cry.

"At the barber's," he replied. "I gave him three roubles, and he squirted scent all over me."

"But where did you get the three roubles?"

"I took them from your purse," he answered.

"Why did you take them?" she asked in horror.

"That's stealing, you should have asked me. I'd have given them to you."

He shook his head.

"No, you wouldn't. You wouldn't have given them to me."

She did not chide him any more, but stroked his velvety boyish bullet head, and wept for his curls, and kissed and kissed him—with a mother's boundless unreasoning love.

At school, the young teacher also spoiled him. He used to boast.

"All the others sit and do their sums, and I go round the class and see how they are doing them."

"And don't you do any sums?"

"Mine are done first."

"But why does the teacher let you walk about the classroom?"

"Because she likes me," he answered.

How did it happen that his son began to slip out of his heart, the doctor wondered?

A time came when he was irritated by that senseless over-indulgence, that atmosphere of adoration surrounding Igor at home.

When Sonechka came home from work, she would sit up until three o'clock in the morning doing Igor's drawings because he was too lazy to do them himself, and the next day they had to be handed in. Disgraceful.

The boy went to school just when it suited him. Who ever heard of such a thing? And very often it did not suit him. He would come home from the skating rink or the pictures when it was nearly midnight, and naturally in the morning he did not want to get up. ... And his

mother—outrageous!—would send a note to the school saying that he had a headache.

What was she trying to make of Igor? A prince or a tramp?

The doctor was resentful on Lyalya's account. The girl worked excellently at school, she was merry, affectionate—a delightful child. And she never received one-half the love that was lavished upon Igor.

Lyalya would meet her father at the door and cry "Daddy's come!" so that it could be heard all over the flat, and jump about, and kiss him. But Igor never appeared until dinner time, and then he would come in scowling and tousled, sprawl in his seat and answer rudely when rebuked.

But Sonechka turned a deaf ear to all remonstrances.

He could not quarrel with Sonechka. Sonechka was Sonechka. She was something sacred, she must not be touched. But everything about Igor irritated him. The way he sat! The way he answered his mother! How little affection he showed, how cold he was, almost supercilious. ...

A time came when the doctor could no longer contain himself, even in Igor's presence.

They were having boiled beef for dinner. Lyalya liked to suck the marrow from the bone; so did Igor. As always it was he who got the bones.

"And is there any reason," said the doctor quietly, "why Lyalya shouldn't have the marrow bone to-day—just by way of an exception?"

Sonechka pretended not to have heard. Lyalya—dear child!—said gaily:

"Why, don't worry, Daddy! Let Igorek have it, I'm big now!"

Igor raised his eyes from his plate and looked thoughtfully and cynically (yes, cynically!) into his father's face ... then he calmly began digging the marrow out of the bone. The doctor sat there flushed, smouldering. ...

From that day, Igor began to avoid him. Yes, he began to avoid his father—evidently he had drawn some

conclusion from this incident. But after all, the boy was only fifteen years old. ... I ought to have had it out with him then and there, he thought. Oh dear, oh dear. How stupid, petty, clumsy. What a terrible misunderstanding, all at cross purposes. ...

The day when he left—the doctor remembered it now—Igor had at first kept in the background, then suddenly came forward and stood beside his father. And when they all said goodbye, Igor bent down to him, looked hard into his face and said in a firm, expressionless voice: "Goodbye, Dad." And there was something new in his eyes, something sharp and piercing. ... Was that farewell? Pardon? Conciliation? ... At that moment he should have embraced Igor and said; "Igorek, my own boy, everything that has come between us—it's all wiped out for ever, there's a clean page before us and we'll fill it together, you and I. ..."

"Igorek, everything that was between us was false, it's the present that's the real truth, and we are facing that truth together, you and I. ..."

CHAPTER IV

JULIA DMITRIYEVNA

"SISTER SMIRNOVA's forgotten to put the stylet in the needle," said Julia Dmitriyevna to the matron, Faïna, and pursed up her thin lips significantly.

Faïna was fully taken up with her own thoughts and affairs—she was standing in front of the mirror on the door, binding a turban of muslin round her head. She glanced carelessly at the syringe which Julia Dmitriyevna was holding solemnly out to her as evidence.

"But why did you give her the syringe.?"

"She gave the electrician an injection. He's in great pain with hæmorrhoids. Dr. Suprugov ordered pantapon injections."

Faïna frowned. She was repelled by unpleasant sicknesses. Only two days previously she had been thinking that the electrician Nizvetsky was quite a handsome young man. And now—hæmorrhoids, of all things! Nizvetsky ceased to exist, so far as Faïna was concerned.

"This train—it's like a collection of old people and cripples," she said.

But Julia Dmitriyevna was not to be turned from her subject.

"If a nurse forgets to put the stylet in the needle, she'll never be any good, that I assure you."

Faïna completed her head-dress, preened herself, turned to Julia Dmitriyevna, and again thought with horror how ugly the theatre sister was. She really was dreadful, poor thing!

"You upset yourself too much over every trifle," said Faïna affectionately. "You should spare your nerves, we've got hard times ahead."

Julia Dmitriyevna raised her brows. Actually, there were no brows, only two puffy red crescents with something like tooth-brush bristles growing along them.

"Things like that aren't trifles. Don't you know that the needle can rust without the stylet?"

"I know!" Faïna answered with a gush of womanly sympathy. "But you mustn't let it upset you like this, dear. Honestly, it's not worth it."

The toothbrushes rose still higher.

"And who else will get upset? It's my duty to be upset about it!"

"She's crazy," thought Faïna. The gush of sympathy had ebbed, and she felt bored.

"I would be much obliged, Faïna Vassilyevna, if you, for your part, would give Sister Smirnova a reprimand. If this sort of thing goes on, we shan't be able to trust her with anything from the dispensary."

"All right, I'll tell her," said Faïna, already irritated, and went out.

"Gone to show herself in her turban," Julia Dmitriyevna correctly guessed.

Julia Dmitriyevna remained alone. She looked around her shining little kingdom with a feeling of pleasure. Everything there, everything in its place. Here—the instruments for operations on bones, there—those for tracheotomy. In the cupboard—sterilized overalls. In the box—sterilized swabs. Rather cramped; with three people in the compartment, there was no room to turn round. But to make up for that, everything was handy. Julia Dmitriyevna's soul was filled with a sense of satisfaction.

And what forethought! According to regulations, operations were not performed in the train, the dispensary was only for dressings. Nevertheless, all the instruments were there, nothing forgotten, any operation could be performed if necessary, even to trepanning. Yes, it would be a pleasure to work here! The commissar was a good man to have, and the doctors were very pleasant, especially Suprugov.

Julia Dmitriyevna was in love with Suprugov.

She was always in love with somebody. When she found herself in a new place, she always looked about and

decided within herself; "There, I'm going to fall in love with that one," and immediately proceeded to do so.

In the town hospital she had been in love with Professor Skuderevsky, with whom she had worked for fourteen years. He had grown old before her eyes, received two Orders, begun and finished an important piece of work on the removal of cancerous growths, fallen ill with Malta fever and recovered—and all the time she had loved him.

Three or four times she had been faithless to the professor, when she had been attracted by young assistants. But the old devotion had risen triumphant, and she had returned to him, berating herself for her fickleness.

He suspected nothing of all this. Nor did the assistants. Nobody thought of Julia Dmitriyevna as a woman, and Professor Skuderevsky would have been thunderstruck to learn that she was in love with him. Nobody ever talked intimately with her.

Once the professor said:

"A good thing you're not married." (Nobody had told him she wasn't—it was perfectly obvious.)

Her heart leapt although she knew that he was married—he had recently celebrated his silver wedding, and had grandchildren.

"Why?" she asked.

"I couldn't work with a married sister," he said. "A theatre sister should devote herself wholly to her work."

As she walked home that evening along the empty dark boulevard, she repeated that short conversation to herself. She told herself that she had sacrificed her personal life for the sake of suffering humanity. No, that was not right, for his sake, Professor Skuderevsky's, she had renounced marriage and motherhood. It was sweeter and sadder, put like that. For his sake. For the love of him. ...

On the Finnish front she fell in love with the brigade doctor. But the Finnish campaign was a short one, and that love passed like a dream.

In the hospital train, Julia Dmitriyevna hesitated for some time between Danilov, the Commandant and Suprugov.

Danilov was the first one she turned down.

"Not sensitive enough," Julia Dmitriyevna decided.

The Commandant had traits similar to the unforgettable Professor Skuderevsky—grey hair, bags under the eyes, a pleasant voice.

"No," thought Julia Dmitriyevna, "in war-time there should be only official relations with the Commandant.

That left Suprugov.

Her love didn't interfere with anything. She worked indefatigably, slept soundly and ate enough for four.

If anybody had offered her a husband, handsome, young and loving, on condition that she gave up her work, she would have raised her brows and answered:

"No."

Her work gave her that place in life which nature had denied her. To be without her work would have meant the loss of heart and hands, the negation of living.

She understood very well that love was not for her, that she would only be a pitiful object of ridicule if anybody knew her feelings. She was proud. She did not betray herself. All those womanly fantasies were hidden deep, deep down, under seven seals, in the farthest corner of her healthy heart.

Julia Dmitriyevna's parents were ordinary people, of ordinary appearance. It was a mystery how both their sons should have turned out young Apollos, and Julia, their only daughter, so long-awaited—hopelessly ugly. At first the mother felt it keenly, and prayed every night that some of her sons' good looks might be transferred to the ill-favoured daughter. Then she became accustomed to it. Later, as the years passed, she even began to find that Julia was not so bad after all. The father would turn the pages in the family album and study the faces of all the relatives, near and distant, trying to guess from whom Julia might have inherited such a distressing appearance. In the end he found what he sought. The

culprit was a great-grandfather, a Greek, a grocer from Nizhni-Novgorod.

"I remember him," said Julia's father. "They used to wheel him about in a chair, and he was always playing Patience. They would put a tray on his knees, and he would lay out his cards on it. He lived to be a hundred and four. A marvellously handsome old man."

"Handsome?" repeated the mother. "And Julia's like him?"

"Believe it or not, she is."

The mother shook her head thoughtfully.

"I didn't know that she had Greek blood."

Greek blood lent a certain exoticism and mystery to the family sorrow. Yes, Julia was not pretty, but what could you do—Greek blood !

Unfortunately, one could not go up to every man and whisper the explanation to him. And men were not very kind to poor Julia. If only one of them had paid the least little bit of attention to her, just once ! But they wanted too much. They did not understand what a treasure that girl was.

Nothing of this was ever discussed, of course. The family considered itself above that. The father was an assistant doctor, fond of abusing the young doctors. According to him, he, the assistant, was the only person in whom the patients had any confidence.

The sons also followed Aesculapius—one became a pharmacist, the other a veterinary surgeon. Both were as handsome as young Greek gods. They were too successful with the girls to have time to finish college, but as the years passed, they became more settled, married ugly and jealous wives, had children, regretted their wasted youth and envied their father.

Julia Dmitriyevna had now been working for twenty-two years as theatre sister.

She looked down on her family. Her elder brothers, scatterbrained, with many children, felt like boys in her presence. They had their weaknesses; they made a good

many mistakes; even when their heads became grey there were many things about which they had no definite views.

Julia Dmitriyevna had no weaknesses—one cannot count those buried under seven seals! She had never made a mistake in her life and had fixed opinions about everything.

The family recognized all this, and looked up to her.

Both in the hospital and in the surgery, it was Julia Dmitriyevna, and not Professor Skuderevsky, who was the authority. The whole staff realized this and feared every twitch of her brows far more than the professor's violent outbreaks. Once, when Julia Dmitriyevna had influenza, the professor refused to perform a complicated operation until she had recovered. And this confirmed the staff in their opinion that Julia Dmitriyevna might manage to get on without the professor, but the professor was helpless without Julia Dmitriyevna.

The dispensary door opened with a sharp jerk. Suprugov entered.

"We seem to be getting there," he said. His eyes were distraught. The train went on. From the windows one could see the same thing over again—woods and meadows. The sun was setting, the tops of the trees were lit up; the shadow of the train ran along the uncut slope.

"Eighteen miles to Pskov," said Suprugov. "You've noticed that we haven't had one stop since this morning?"

He turned to her because in her eyes alone he found human understanding and warmth. The others, as though by mutual consent, ignored him. It is true that Faina favoured him, but that was mere feminine coyness. Women had never excited him, now they had become plainly repulsive.

"They're taking us right into the thick of the bombs," he said.

"I don't know anything about that," said Julia Dmitriyevna, rather coldly.

"Have a good look at that forest," he said. "Maybe we'll never see it again."

His eyes filled with tears. Julia Dmitriyevna sighed. She had no fear of bombs, she had been at the front in the Finnish campaign. But it was pleasant to have him standing here beside her, talking to her. Her sigh was one of love.

"Look, look!" cried Suprugov.

There was a break in the forest and between its dark wings a road could be seen shrouded in a haze of dust. It was crowded with endless columns of troops, slowly moving guns, a dense column of canvas-covered lorries. A horseman galloped along the ditch at the side, overtaking the lorries. All this flashed into sight for a moment and then disappeared behind the forest again.

"Retreating," said Suprugov, wringing his hands. "And we're going to the place they're leaving."

"I don't see that they're retreating," Julia Dmitriyevna contradicted him. "How can you tell? It may be just an ordinary regrouping of troops. We can't understand these things."

"We know that they're beating us," said Suprugov, raising his voice, "all the communiqués speak of it, and you try to look as though everything in the garden's lovely. But if anybody asks you why you do it, you yourself can't tell me. ..."

Why had he raised his voice? He had never before dared to do so to anybody. Why did he feel that he could raise his voice to her?

"I don't think in the least that everything's lovely," she answered calmly. "I simply said that they might be regrouping, and not retreating. You can't prove that it's a retreat."

Her mouth closed obstinately. She did not want to give way, not even for love of him.

Black smoke poured along the windows. The sun was still high, but it seemed as though it was already evening. It was hard to breathe.

"It smells of fire," said Danilov. He stood with Dr

Belov in the corridor of the staff coach. The highway ran parallel to the rails. Ammunition lorries, the infantry, moved along in a large stream. Now even Julia Dmitriyevna would agree that it looked more than anything like a retreat. The armies moved in the opposite direction to the trains.

"We're giving up Pskov," Danilov said in a whisper. The Doctor looked on, sniffing. He was thinking: did Igor leave Pskov, did he have time to leave? It was fantastic, of course, to believe that one could find a boy among such a crowd of men. But what if it *did* happen? How glad Sonechka would be. He would take Igor on the train. As a male nurse, Danilov would not pander to him. In a few months Igor would be like a lamb. Then he, the doctor, would take him to Sonechka and say: "This is what comes of being brought up by men."

"We must shut the windows," he said aloud, "or the sheets will be covered with soot. Faïna Vassilyevna"—he turned to the head-sister who was passing by—"Will you issue orders for the windows to be shut?"

But it so happened that the attendants, protecting the linen, had shut the windows in all the carriages on their own. Whereas Faïna, also on her own, had ordered that they should be opened and had reprimanded the male nurses about it.

"It's just silly," Faïna had said to the Doctor. "If you shut them, the first blast will break all the panes."

She moved on. The doctor and Danilov exchanged a glance.

"And the dispensary coach?" the Doctor asked.

"We can do nothing," said Danilov, paling with anger.

In the dispensary the windows were hermetically closed.

"'Ah, knight, Faïna was her name,'" said Sobol, meeting Faïna in the passage and making way for her.

Faïna swept her skirts across his knees and without a glance at him walked to her compartment. She hated Sobol who fed her on barley groats. Faïna had a specially

bold and belligerent air about her to-day. Like Julia Dmitriyevna she had had a mouthful of the war in 1940. She knew what lay in front of her, maybe tonight, even at this moment. In her compartment she first glanced at the mirror, got her medicine case and checked up on it, then sat down to relax before a serious job. Hang it all, she would prove to them all that she was able to do more than tie a turban round her head. She looked at her hands with pride. They were a worker's hands, a nurse's, with short fat fingers, dark from iodine and carbolic, with closely cut nails.

Sobol peeped into the compartment.

"Well? Shall we have some supper?"

"Isn't that the idea?" asked Faïna. "You of course would like to stop feeding us altogether."

"I would," Sobol agreed. "It's an awful bother, this feeding. No, fooling apart, is it the right moment to offer supper? On the brink, so to say, of events?"

She flew into a temper.

"Go to hell! Now's the very moment to feed people up properly."

Danilov appeared behind Sobol's shoulder.

"Comrade Sobol," he said, "will you please distribute tinned meat besides groats for supper, one tin per four people and condensed milk for tea in the same proportion."

Sobol was expecting no events, he was just teasing Faïna. He glanced pathetically at Danilov. What, the Commissar was releasing meat and condensed milk? Great events must be looming indeed!

"One tin for four," he whispered. "Sixty-seven divided by four, can't be done, let's take sixty-eight. ... "

"Thanks, many thanks, Comrade Commissar," said Faïna when the frightened Sobol went away. "That barley is enough to drive anyone mad."

"What can we do?" said Danilov. "We're on our way to the front—who knows what we shall find there? I wanted to warn you: don't talk to the head of the train as you did a moment ago—it isn't done."

THE TRAIN

"What did I say?" Faïna seemed surprised.

"You said 'How silly'; he was giving you an order. And you said 'How silly'."

"Heavens above! I wasn't talking about him! I was talking about the male nurses!"

"Even if you disagree about the order ..."

Suddenly the train gave a lurch, a glass fell with a clatter on the floor, the door banged and would have closed if Danilov had not stopped it with his shoulder.

"Ah!" exclaimed Faïna, and her eyes flashed. "Did you feel that?"

The train shook more violently.

"Comrade Commissar," said Faïna, "I apologize of course. I'm not a novice and should know discipline. But take into consideration that I am a woman and that I have nerves as well as anybody else."

She listened. She wanted the train to shake again. War is war after all, isn't it?

They had supper. The train crawled along slowly, half-heartedly, now and then stopped altogether. The highway with the retreating troops disappeared in the background. One could see the suburbs from the windows: huts and orchards and meadows hedged in. A country house gleamed in the distance: four smoky white walls without a roof and the empty eyes of windows. A village could be seen in flames and a cornfield behind it—smoke pervaded the air. The soil was dug up in trenches. Hardly any human beings about. The train shook almost uninterruptedly. And through the noise of the wheels one could hear the uninterrupted din of bombardment.

Julia Dmitriyevna stood in the dispensary looking out of the window. So this was the land which the enemy was going to take—Pskov. She knew Pskov. She had relations living there, and had stayed with them when she had been a girl. She had driven from the station in a cab, because there had been no trams then; now they probably had them. The lindens had been in bloom,

and there was a honey-like perfume everywhere. It was evening, with a dark warm sky and church bells ringing, slowly, majestically. ... Her aunt used to say: "We're Pskov people," as though there was nobody to compare with Pskov people in the whole of Russia. What was it like now, Pskov? Like that roofless cottage? Like that smoking village? It was standing there, defaced by bombs; the troops were leaving, and it was standing and smoking, scarred with trenches. ...

But Julia Dmitriyevna did not see Pskov.

For a long time the train was shunted over a criss-cross tangle of rails; there were long goods trains on either side, the rattle and rumble deafened them, and the windows were dark with smoke. Sometimes the black clouds would clear and the sky could be seen, angry red from the glare of burning buildings. Then the train halted. Julia Dmitriyevna called the nurse.

"Klava! Go to the staff coach and find out where the Commandant and commissar are."

It worried her to be standing there doing nothing when it was quite obvious that there must be people all around who were needing help.

"Aren't there any orders?"

"Just a moment, Julia Dmitriyevna. I'll get out and run along outside, shall I?"

"Don't you know the regulations—that nobody leaves the train? Go through the coaches."

Klava went. A train standing before the dispensary windows began to move. For a long time its sealed coaches kept flashing by—away from the town—and then it was gone. Another train was standing on a further line, but it was lighter in the coach; now tongues of flame were visible somewhere beyond—first one, then another would flare raggedly into that ominous red sky. ... The hospital train, too, began to move—closer to the station; it came out into the lurid light of the fires, and then stood there, alone, fearlessly exposed with its red crosses on the roofs. Fires were raging to right and left.

Klava came back.

"Well, what are they doing there?"

"Julia Dmitriyevna, the Commandant said that you should stay where you are. The commissar has gone to the evacuation point for orders."

"And where does he think I'd be likely to go?" Julia Dmitriyevna enquired loftily.

Again the train began to move. It was now quite close to the station. Everything around was burning and nobody was making any attempt to put out the fires. People were running about everywhere. There were four men standing at the edge of the platform—three civilians with suitcases, and Danilov.

"Surgeons!" Klava reported, after running to the staff coach on her own initiative. "The casualty clearing station has sent us three surgeons, they're going to operate here."

Surgeons! Julia Dmitriyevna's heart burned with anticipation of the real work to come. Therapy—what was that? From Julia Dmitriyevna's point of view it was not so much medical science as cheiromancy. But now real medical science was entering the coach in the person of these civilians with their suit-cases. Operations in the train, first dressings!

She arranged everything quickly. Three surgeons—three tables. One in the dispensary, two in the wash-room. Instruments—sufficient. Overalls, gloves—sufficient. Who would assist? First of all, of course, she herself, Julia Dmitriyevna. Then—Suprugov. No, his nerves were weak. Assistant Army Doctor Olga Mikhailovna—second, Faina Vassilyevna—third.

"Klava! Draw the blackout curtains on the wash-room window. Lights on. Take those shades off the lamps. Wash the table with permanganate."

Crash! A dispensary window blown in by a bomb. Glass splinters scattered about the coach.

Klava crossed herself. She had never done such a thing in her life before, but now she did it involuntarily.

Julia Dmitriyevna looked at her scornfully.

"Klava! I'll wash the table myself. You clear away the glass."

The real work was beginning.

Faïna had been right. In half an hour, there was not one unbroken window in the whole dispensary coach.

The nurses cleared away the glass. They were frightened, and two of the girls began to cry. But what hurt everybody most was that the Germans should be spoiling such a lovely coach.

"How I've worked to keep it nice!" said Klava softly, as she swept splinters into an iron shovel.

The buxom Iya could not stand it. She broke the rules and ran out of the train. A bomb crater beyond the burning station seemed to her the most secure refuge. They forgot about her, and the next day she came back, black with dust, with clods of earth in her hair and scorched eyelashes.

Danilov gathered a first-aid group—nurses, sisters, orderlies, soldiers. Nizvetsky appeared.

"I'm coming with you," he said.

"And what about the lighting?" asked Danilov.

"Kravtsov'll keep an eye on it. He understands it. It gets dark late now."

"No, today we won't be able to make out with daylight. They'll be operating."

"Kravtsov...."

"Nothing to do with Kravtsov. Kravtsov's the engineer, and the electrician—that's you. You'll have to stay here."

"Well, I'm not staying, whatever you say," said Faïna. "I'm for the front, for the field, neither bombs nor shells'll touch me."

Danilov smiled involuntarily at her boasting.

"I can't take you, Faïna Vassilyevna, the Commandant's assigned you to the surgical department."

"Damn!" said Faïna. "My luck's out. Here, you take my satchel," she said to Lena Ogorodnikova, who was standing on the platform, her hands behind her back,

her boyish head thrown back. "You take it, you're a fine kid, ready for anything."

"Now, doctor," Danilov said to Suprugov. "All Europe's watching us."

Suprugov was holding the rail as though he could not tear himself from it. ... He turned a dead face to Danilov. He began to say something—when suddenly there was an explosion close to the line, and a cloud of fine coal dust descended on the two men.

Suprugov suddenly seemed to realize what was happening.

"Finito!" he said, and went down the steps.

Later on, trying to unravel his emotions, this is how he defined them: at that moment he seemed to accept that death was unavoidable; that it would be a horrid death. And all he wanted was to cross the barrier, to pass swiftly into nothingness. Above all no fear. Peace, silence, safety. Therefore, let him get instantly into the most dangerous spot. "Here I am!" everything in Suprugov seemed to cry out when he stepped on to the platform lit up with a sinister light, demolished by bombs. "Here I am, put a quick end to me, I can no longer bear to be afraid."

Danilov took his hand, and Suprugov ran with him, stamping with his heavy boots. It was sultry, and his eyes smarted from the smoke. ... A soldier was coming along the street outside the station, dragging his rifle after him. He left a track of blood, and the trailing rifle smeared it over the dust.

"Is it far to the hospital train?" he asked. "They told me to go to the hospital train."

"There it is, the other side of the hut, you can see it from here," Danilov replied. "Can you get there alone or do you want a stretcher?"

"I can go alone," the soldier replied. "You'll be needing all your stretchers."

Round the corner a boy of about fourteen was lying, quite conscious; he did not groan, but watched the approaching orderlies with grim, burning eyes.

"Stretcher!" said Danilov, while Lena bent down and raised the boy as though he were a child. He suddenly shuddered convulsively, his head dropped back and he lost consciousness.

"Don't push yourself forward, if you don't know how," said Sukhoyedov angrily. "You're not playing with dolls. Put him on the stretcher, what are you standing there staring for?"

A rending, tearing howl and an explosion nearby. A dark cloud covered the group and then began to disperse.

"Everybody all right?" asked Danilov after a moment's silence.

Yes, everybody was all right, only blackened and deafened.

The black Suprugov smiled wildly.

"Take the lad to Julia Dmitriyevna," Danilov told Sukhoyedov and Medvedyev. "And we'll go on. You can catch up with us later, and if you don't, pick up anyone you find and take them to the train."

"What was that?" asked Suprugov as they were going along the street. "A shell or a mine?"

"A mine. Why?"

Suprugov coughed and spat out black saliva. His tunic was torn on the shoulder.

"Eh, what's that!" said Danilov. "Did a splinter get you?"

"What? Where? Ah, here? That's nothing. It's just a scratch. A trifle, nothing to talk about."

He was like a drunken man. He was staggered. Staggered by the consciousness of his own reckless courage.

Dr. Belov walked through the train.

A hot wind was blowing in through the open windows of the empty coaches. The flickering, surging smoky light from outside lighted the whole train. Only that very morning these coaches had looked so comfortable. ...

In every carriage a soldier and a nurse, scared and restless.

The staff coach was empty. All except those on duty had gone with Danilov.

"I've forgotten something," thought the doctor as he walked along the train. "I've forgotten something. ... "

But what it was he could not tell.

Everything seemed ready, everything foreseen. The surgeons were masters in the dispensary, it was their job. A group had gone to fetch wounded. Danilov could be depended upon. ... Yes, food. Supper would have to be prepared for the people. And breakfast in the morning.

"Sister Smirnova, send somebody for the quartermaster."

Sobol appeared. The doctor glanced at him with an unwilling curiosity—was he dividing up the rations or not? No, Sobol was not dividing up the rations; he was trembling and seemed to have shrunk, like a balloon when the air leaks out.

"Well," said the doctor, "we'll have to prepare some supper, you know. Now let's see,"—he thought for a moment. "For a hundred and twenty, yes. A good supper."

"Supper's over," Sobol stammered.

"A good one, you know," the doctor repeated, ignoring the objection. "And taking the wounded into consideration, they'll be arriving from to-day on. None of your tasteless millet, but good whole meal porridge, with jam, say, and coffee, and biscuits, and butter—you understand?"

"Butter?" Sobol repeated, wondering if he was dreaming.

"Yes. Fifty grams a head."

"Fifty," Sobol whispered, rolling his eyes to the ceiling. "Fifty times a hundred and twenty, that's six thousand—six kilograms. ..."

"There's something I've forgotten," thought the doctor, when he had finished with Sobol. "Something I've forgotten, forgotten. ..."

Suddenly he remembered.

Why had he done nothing to find Igor? Surely there was something that could be done. Telephone. Write an application. Enquire somewhere, ask somebody. ... Absurd, madness—where could he telephone, where could he enquire, whom could he ask? ... No, no, something could have been done, no doubt about that. It was just that he didn't know how to set about it. Sonechka would have managed it. He was incompetent, he was never competent in such matters. Sonechka would have found a way because she loved Igor. Real love is always ingenious, it can do anything. He had never loved Igor enough, he was a useless, neglectful, incapable father. He loved Lyalya more. Yet was she any better? Nothing but curls, operettas and flirtation in her head. Just good at getting round him. ... She'd make sweet eyes at him, and he would give her money for the theatre, but when Igor asked him for something, he refused. A miserable thirty roubles. ... My own boy, forgive me. Take everything, take my old worn-out life, only live! Only come back! Only don't go away like that, so suddenly, my boy.

When Julia Dmitriyevna left home for the army, both her brothers came to see her off with their wives and children and all their relations. There was a great baking of cakes, and churning of the ice-cream freezer, just as though it were a birthday party, and Julia Dmitriyevna herself had moved the table and spread the best white cloth on it. That had been twelve days ago. And now again she was moving tables and spreading white cloths over them.

The first wounded man arrived—a soldier. He stacked his rifle in the corner and looked about him in a businesslike manner.

"Which table shall I lie down on?" he asked.

You could see at a glance that this was a veteran who knew his way about.

"Whichever you like," Julia Dmitriyevna answered benevolently. "But take your clothes off first. Where are you wounded? Leg? Klava! Cut his boot off!"

She herself was standing and holding an overall ready for the professor to slip into when he had finished washing. He had white, slightly puffy professorial hands, like Professor Skuderevsky's. The washroom window was covered, and intensely bright lamps shone over the table. It never entered anybody's head that it was senseless to cover this light when the whole train was plainly visible in the bright glare of the fires.

Klava cut the wounded man's boot off and turned away in horror.

"Well, what's up with you? What's wrong, eh? Not used to it yet?" said the soldier, frowning. "It's only a flea-bite, if you want to know—the bone isn't even touched."

Julia Dmitriyevna fastened the professor's overall, poured spirit over his pink palms and handed him the gloves. The handsome old man, rather like an actor, looked in perplexity at her contented face ...

But in two minutes he understood her. Here was the born nurse, who regarded the profession as a sacred duty. He never had to ask her for anything, it was all to hand as she anticipated his needs.

The wounded soldier bore the dressing unflinchingly, without a single groan, only occasionally letting out his breath in a loud: "F-f-fu!" Julia Dmitriyevna adored such patients. She could not stand whiners. She heard nothing of the roar about her, completely absorbed in what she was doing. The only thing that troubled her was the heat, the coach was unbearably stuffy and the ventilators seemed barely to stir the air. With the pincers she took a swab and wiped the sweat from the wounded man's face.

"Thank you," said the soldier.

A boy was brought in with a shattered tibia, unconscious. He had splendidly developed muscles—probably he had been a footballer, or a cyclist. ... She saw at a glance that the leg would have to be amputated, saw it even before the professor did.

"Those damned swine!" said Faïna, looking at the boy.

The lad's chin was trembling, and he was grinding his teeth. ... The professor asked Julia Dmitriyevna:

"Can you give chloroform?"

Could she give chloroform! To be perfectly frank, she could have performed the amputation as well. The only reason she did not attempt it was the lack of formal right to do so.

She laid the chloroform mask on the lad's face. ... When the rasping of the saw cutting through the bone was heard, Faïna went to the window, turned her face away and wept.

During the operation Dr Belov came in.

"Do you need me?" he asked.

Julia Dmitriyevna gave him a threatening look. He approached timidly, stretching out his neck to look at the wounded. ... A woman was lying on the other table in the washroom.

"The boy to number eleven in the Krieger," the doctor told Sister Smirnova, who had entered with him. "The woman... "

"No need to place the woman," said Olga Mikhailovna, the assistant doctor, who was at the second table. She removed the mask from the woman's face. A broad, Slav face with rather high cheekbones. Sable brows. A beautiful mouth. A line of brown freckles crossing the nose.

"Too late," said the surgeon.

Suddenly he was hurled against the other table, where the boy lay, the boy was flung to the floor, and everybody staggered and fell except Julia Dmitriyevna, who shot across to the door and grasped the towel rail. Flakes of white paint floated from the walls and ceiling. A piece of the frame broke off, and scratched Julia Dmitriyevna's temple with its sharp corner.

"That was very close," said Dr Belov.

"Very," Julia Dmitriyevna agreed, lifting the boy. "I think it must have been a direct hit on our train."

Kostritsyn and Medvedyev came running into the dispensary coach from opposite ends, shouting:

"Coach fourteen's on fire! Where's the Commandant?"

The Commandant was already down on the rails, running as fast as his legs would carry him to the burning coach.

It was blazing fiercely—dry wood, dry paint. Fortunately that there were no wounded there yet. Was everybody safe? There was Nadya—stooping down, spitting blood ... There was blood on her overall.

"Nadya, what's the matter—are you wounded?"

"Why, of course not, Comrade Commander. I cut my lip against the shelf."

"And Kostritsyn's alive?"

"He's all right, he went to fetch you."

Here he was, running up, with a bucket of water in his hand—what use was a bucket here? And Medvedyev after him.

From the opposite direction came Kravtsov and Nizvetsky, walking along as though to-morrow would do.

"Quick, lads, quick!" cried the doctor.

Nizvetsky began to double, Kravtsov continued at the same pace, sauntering up, hands in pockets.

"Help carry water, lads," said the doctor. "Call everybody, we'll all throw it on the coach."

"Where's the water, then?" asked Kravtsov gruffly.

"Water? There's water in the tanks. There's water in the engine. ..."

"That's a trickle, not water," said Kravtsov, and suddenly roared at the soldiers:

"Hi! Uncouple the coach! There's a dynamo right alongside, and those fools standing there with their mouths open! Here, friend," he added, catching a passing oiler by the sleeve. "Lend us a hand, you know the job. We've got to get that coach uncoupled."

"Like hell I will!" said the greaser. "Hundreds of coaches gone, and I'm to worry about uncoupling some bit of a thing like that."

"It's absolutely necessary, friend," said Kravtsov.

"There's wounded here, there's a dynamo there. There's no other way, it's got to be uncoupled."

"You go to the devil! Fancy uncoupling a coach with bombs falling," said the oiler.

"I'll give you the devil," roared Kravtsov, his eyes blazing, and punched the oiler on the ear. The doctor stood there, rooted to the spot with the unexpectedness of it all ... The oiler retaliated by kicking Kravtsov in the stomach, and Kravtsov hit him again on the back of the neck. The oiler cursed again, and crawled under to uncouple the burning coach. The conductor appeared from somewhere, his clothing stained with earth—he had probably been lying in some nearby shell-hole. They pushed the burning coach farther away, and began throwing water from the engine over it.

Meanwhile, Julia Dmitriyevna was standing beside the table, handing instruments and swabs to the professor. She prepared the men for operation. ... The whole night the town was under fire and the whole night wounded kept coming in. Some were brought on stretchers, some on lorries, others walked in themselves ... Towards morning the professor's strength gave out.

"That's enough," he said, and tore the fastenings of his overall apart, without waiting to undo them. "I'm all in. Been at it five days and nights. ..."

Faïna took him to the staff coach to rest. She told Julia Dmitriyevna that she'd take the chance to go to her own compartment and change at the same time, her stomach was rising with the smell of blood, and her underclothes were wet with perspiration. ...

"I'm done too," said the other surgeon, a small black-haired man with a lemon-yellow face, and disappeared. Olga Mikhailovna lay down right there on the divan in the wash-room. "For a second, just for a second!" she said like a child and fell asleep before the words were out of her mouth. There remained a young surgeon with his fair hair *en brosse*, a nose like a rudder, and taller than Danilov.

"Well?" he asked, looking at Julia Dmitriyevna.

"Well!" she replied with approval, and went over to his table.

They worked together in silence. The coach shook and trembled with the bombardment, but they worked with never a thought whether this night would ever end, if morning would come soon, if they would be able to rest. ... As he worked, the young doctor whistled something, barely audibly, between his teeth—something beautiful; Julia Dmitriyevna liked it.

Olga Mikhailovna wakened after two hours, jumped up and ran to rouse the others. The first to return was Faïna, fresh as a rose, then the old professor.

"And you're still on your feet!" he said rather apologetically to Julia Dmitriyevna, as he washed his hands.

She did not reply—she was counting the swabs which the young doctor had taken from the wound he had been exploring, and only indicated to Faïna with a movement of her brows that she should give the professor his overall.

All morning wounded were brought to the train and carried in. The beds filled. Sobol prepared breakfast for three hundred. Dr Belov ordered dinner for five hundred. ... The nurses were no longer carrying the buckets out to the shell-holes, they emptied the blood right on to the lines.

At mid-day Danilov entered the staff coach.

"Well, how's it going? Taken on enough?" he asked.

"I'm afraid we have," replied the doctor. "Even the staff coach is full now. We're putting them on the floor, and we can be rapped over the knuckles for that."

They went through the train. The coaches were crowded; they smelt of antiseptic and sweat, and flies were everywhere. There were many slight cases. They had come on foot and remained in the train so as to have a chance of leaving the town. Most of these were civilians. One woman, with a shattered shoulder-blade, had brought four children with her—Faïna pushed them into her own compartment. All this was contrary to rules and regulations, but that night everybody forgot

about regulations and thought only of the common suffering of Russian people, soldiers and civilians alike.

The doctor again looked over all the beds—how many times he had already done so! All the time he was thinking—suppose Igor should be here. ... But there was no Igor.

“Ivan Egorych,” said the doctor. “You ought to lie down, my dear fellow. You’ve been working like a Trojan all night, you can’t go on like that.”

The doctor himself had not slept, he had been running about, making arrangements for the wounded, and putting out the fire; apart from a tiny glass of vodka which Kravtsov had given him, nothing had passed his lips. But the doctor felt that he was the only one doing nothing, and that miserable glass of vodka seemed to him a direct offence against human and military ethics. If only Danilov did not find out about that vodka ...

“I’ve an idea,” said Danilov. “There are abandoned trains here with valuable loads. They’ll be burned. We could very well take one of them with us.”

“How?”

“Why, with our engine. Couple it on behind. I’ve spoken to the local transport officer, and he’s very pleased.”

Danilov thought that the doctor would be equally glad. But the doctor looked at him, blinking his weary eyes, and seemed in no hurry to answer.

“Excuse me, Ivan Egorych,” he said at last. “But it seems to me this isn’t a thing to be settled off hand. You must understand that I’m a doctor first and foremost, and I’m responsible for the lives of my patients. If this extra weight affects the movement of the train, I shall be unable to agree.”

He spoke very mildly, but there was something in his blinking eyes that Danilov understood; the Commandant was beginning to feel himself a commandant. Danilov reddened, he wanted to say: “You’re not only a doctor, you’re a Soviet citizen, and it’s your duty to

save State property!" But the doctor, as though forestalling him, said:

"We shall make up for the value, you know. After all, our load is the most valuable thing there is, isn't it?"

They met Julia Dmitriyevna erect and triumphant, only a little paler than usual. There were uneven trickles of dried blood on her temples.

The doctor saluted her. She bowed condescendingly and went past.

"And that," said the doctor, looking after her, "that, I think, is the most valuable thing in the train."

And who discovered her? thought Danilov, I did! You came and found everything ready for you, and now you're giving your orders!

But he understood that it was war-time, and this was the Commandant of his unit. He said nothing.

Suprugov had returned to the train with Danilov. He too had been going about the town all night under fire, giving first aid to the wounded. Actually, he was too frail for such work. He had been living on his nerves. He had not even started when a shell burst near him; he seemed to see himself as though it were somebody else whom he was watching from some immense height. And as though from this same height he saw the pleasing picture of a doctor returning from the battlefield, where every second had brought danger of death or mutilation. There was the tear on this brave doctor's tunic, he was deathly weary, he was black as a Negro, his puttees and the knees of his breeches were soaked with blood, the feet were blistered by his boots. ... But he pulled himself up the handrail jauntily and went into the staff coach. Fima, the kitchen maid, shrank away from him. ...

"Hot water!" he called to her as he passed. "And a clean overall, and get this one washed to-day."

Fima looked at Suprugov, her eyes round with devotion, and ran for water. ...

"Smirnova!" Suprugov called from the compartment

to the sister hurrying along the corridor. "Tell the supply sister to send me some breakfast."

He stripped off his tunic. Smirnova glanced into the compartment, saw his blackened head, his arms blood-stained to the elbows, shrank back and ran to the kitchen.

"Aha, got them running about!" Suprugov said to himself.

Stripped to the waist, his braces dangling, he went to wash, deliberately half-clad. Fima followed on tiptoe with a jug of hot water. He held out his cupped palms.

"Pour it out!"

The hospital train, scorched and blackened, its windows shattered, returned to its base. A burnt-out coach dangled at the tail. Green lights glowed in front of it, and other trains made way for it.

PART II

Morning

CHAPTER V

FROM EAST TO WEST

RECALLING the first trips, the people in the hospital train wondered at themselves; how was it that they had not realized the simplest things? Why, for instance, had they blacked-out the coach windows when the train had been standing, uncamouflaged, by the open platform, plainly visible even to distant bombers? Why had they felt that the train was the safest refuge, and that the people taking stretchers into the town were daring heroes going to certain death? In fact there had been much less risk under the open sky. But it was only later that they realized this, when the front was already far behind. Recalling it, they laughed at their own ignorance.

"Just imagine!" Dr Suprugov cried to Julia Dmitriyevna, to whom he talked more than to the others. "I thought that we were all taking a desperate chance when we left the coaches. Why, it was the only sensible thing to do."

It made Faïna angry: how long was the man going to keep on chewing the cud? But she said nothing, because she had certain designs on Suprugov. ...

Faïna was now sharing a compartment with Julia Dmitriyevna. Really she should have shared with Olga Mikhailovna, the assistant doctor. The matron and assistant doctor had almost identical functions in the train: Olga Mikhailovna was in charge of the coach for serious cases, Faïna the one for slight wounds; but their duties were almost identical. They should have lived together, but they did not get on. Olga Mikhailovna,

shy, modest and consistent, did not take to the boisterous Faïna. The matron's open way of running after men seemed immoral to Olga Mikhailovna. Without meaning to, she kept picking on Faïna, never overlooking the slightest failing. At the daily ten-minute conference in the morning, when all the medical personnel gathered, Olga Mikhailovna never missed a chance to give Faïna a pinprick about her mistakes. They were all trifles—that two of Faïna's throat patients had broken the regulations and gone strolling about the train; that, owing to a nurse's oversight, a patient who was on strict diet had eaten a cabbage-pie bought from a woman at a station. Olga Mikhailovna's voice rang with a sharp edge when she disclosed these disgraceful affairs, while Faïna sat there crimson, breathing hard. It was difficult for her to justify herself. It was true—the men *had* been walking about the train; it was true that the lieutenant from coach five had eaten the cabbage-pie and had later vomited, and it was also true that Faïna had to answer for it all.

It was all very well for Olga Mikhailovna; in her Krieger coach she had only a hundred and ten men—and what were they like?—Almost all of them amputation cases, tied down to their beds. There they lay, poor beggars, in their cots with side-nets like children, and for the most part kept quiet. There was no need to worry about anybody *there* breaking the rules, taking a walk along the train, or going in his pyjamas to buy pies or vodka at the stops. ...

She, Faïna, had about three hundred people in her charge whenever the train was loaded. As soon as dinner was over, treatment began—massage, baths, electric treatment—enough to drive you crazy; from morning till night the sisters and nurses ran themselves off their feet, and Faïna most of all. And then try to keep an eye on each and every one, to see that he did not eat anything that was forbidden! Those weren't old men or paralytics, good Lord! They were healthy young fellows, slightly wounded, but full of life. At first, when

they were in pain, they moaned and groaned and were in a panic lest they should be crippled, unfit for work. But as soon as they began to improve, they were telling jokes and funny stories, making up to the nurses, and singing; they were ready for anything and everything, even to go right back into battle. ... If you told them: "Comrade, vodka's bad for you!" they would laugh and say: "Vodka? Oho! Just watch me drink a hundred grams—it'll cure all diseases in a jiffy!" And what could you say to them? They were right—it would.

Such are Russian men. Faïna, a Russian woman, could understand them. ... "You don't know anything about life, my dear," she thought, listening in silence to Olga Mikhailovna. "You see all this as a pathetic picture. A wounded man lying groaning: 'Sister! Water! A drop of water!' And yourself over him like an angel of mercy. ... No, my dear, it may happen that you get a glass of medicine flung in your face, because here you've got nerve-shattered, irritable cases, they've been looking death in the face; and you wipe it off and say nothing, and bring some more medicine, and persuade him to drink it—that's what being a nurse means. And while you've been attending to him, there's another one gone to take a walk along the train."

Faïna said nothing of all this aloud; there are certain regulations issued by the medical corps, there are instructions from the evacuation and transit station, there are a commandant and a commissar in the train—she, Faïna, was small fry, it wasn't for her to be pushing herself forward with her opinions. ...

But Faïna found unexpected support in Julia Dmitriyevna.

"The doctor's assistant won't ever get anywhere," she said one day.

Faïna glowed.

"Why do you think so?"

"Her whole life's made up of small, trifling things. They fill all her thoughts. She's no time to spare for the big things."

Faïna was surprised.

"Julia Dmitriyevna, don't be offended, but your life's made up of small things, too. ..."

"But that's my duty," Julia Dmitriyevna retorted. "In the surgery the slightest neglect may have the most serious consequences for the patient. But at the same time, a doctor or a nurse should have the courage and the ability to ignore unimportant details. The assistant doctor is conscientious, and nothing more. In time she'll develop into an average medical practitioner for uninteresting cases. She'd be good at treating influenza or the itch. She's no good for scientific work, but just for every-day practice."

"And I?" asked Faïna.

Julia Dmitriyevna surveyed her critically—from the waved hair to the fashionable, worn shoes.

"You could go in for science. I feel you've got possibilities. You could go in for science if you didn't let things distract you."

Faïna sighed and embraced Julia Dmitriyevna. She wanted to kiss her, but thought better of it.

"You're right, it's terrible how right you are," said Faïna.

And when the sisters living in the staff coach had to pair up, so as to make room for an office, it seemed to happen of itself that Julia Dmitriyevna moved into Faïna's compartment, and Faïna was sincerely glad of it.

Now the hospital train was no longer making the trip to the front. Special trains had been allocated for this—"flying trains," consisting of just a few coaches. Rather better fitted-up trains, called "temporary hospital trains," evacuated the wounded from the front-line zone and brought them to the field hospitals. And special base trains took the men deep into the interior, often thousands of miles from the battlefield.

According to the new classification, this train was a typical base train. For the front it was too big, too unwieldy, and too expensive. It was a mobile hospital,

comfortable and excellently equipped. After the first two trips to the front—to Pskov and Tikhvin—it was assigned to the base.

Some of the staff were well satisfied with the change—peaceful people who had been sorely tried by the dangers of the front. The necessity of keeping cool and working under fire had been a strain on their nerves. Others regarded it with indifference.

But there were also people who were unhappy, disappointed, even hurt about the transfer to the rear.

Nizvetsky was unhappy. Julia Dmitriyevna was disappointed. Faïna was hurt.

Danilov was pulled two ways.

On the one hand, he had come to love his train, and every day found him more jealous for it. In the depths of his heart he was glad that this beautiful train had been taken away from enemy bombs. On the other hand, he was not so pleased to find himself far from the front, doing work that seemed to him trivial. Sometimes, like Sukhoyedov, he felt that he had been thrust aside, and then he was angry, had murderous thoughts of Potapenko who had sent him to do this work, and frightened the nurses with his black looks. Later, he could take himself in hand, and the gloomy fit passed, only to return after a little.

The Germans had already been driven from Moscow. Leningrad had stood its first hard winter. Spring was in the air. Danilov waited tensely to see what the summer would bring. Then the Germans launched a new offensive and began approaching the Kuban, the Caucasus, and Danilov burned with fury and helplessness.

"Pull yourself together, man," he told himself, more soberly. "Think they can't manage there without you?"

He sent an application to the evacuation authorities, asking to be transferred to active service. No reply. He sent a letter to Potapenko personally—no reply. He wrote to the military department of the Communist Party Central Committee.

The coach which had been burned out in Pskov was taken to Kirov for repairs.

The railway yard had refused to handle the job, pleading lack of workers. "The coach is done for, if you start messing about with it you'll never be through," said the railwaymen. In the workshops the men had gone to the front, and lads and young girls were doing the work. ... Danilov talked to his own people, and they agreed to tackle the job themselves. Danilov placed Protassov, the coach repair foreman, dignified and indolent, in charge of the brigade. Kravtsov, it appeared, could turn his hand to anything—he was fitter, welder and glazier. The whole day he and Protassov argued until they were hoarse. Each one insisted upon his own way, and his own right to decide the issue, but in the evening they disappeared together, and returned more than a little tipsy, and filled with the greatest affection for each other. Sukhoyedov, Medvedyev, Kostritsyn, Nizvetsky, Bogeichuk, Goremykin—all the men except the doctors helped in the repair work, and even Danilov recalled what he had learned from his father, and went to work as Kravtsov's assistant. The girls hauled materials, cleared up, painted the coach and got in everybody's way. ... And within six fine April days, the work was finished.

All this pleased Danilov mightily. It was not so much the value of the coach—though it was satisfying to know that nothing that had been entrusted to them had been lost to the enemy—but it was especially pleasant for him to see how the other people in the train shared his feeling, how they regarded the repaired coach with new eyes, with a feeling of personal interest. Even Protassov's puffy, unshaven face shone with satisfaction when he stood on the platform, stomach thrust forward and legs astride, to look at what his hands had done.

A meeting was called to celebrate the successful conclusion of the work. Kravtsov appeared in a smart jacket and tie. There was a great deal said about him, and all of it was praise. Danilov was amazed—what had

happened to the Mephistophelian frown? The hardened drinker blushed and melted like a young girl listening to compliments. ... But the next morning, Danilov was again confronted by the scorched old devil with hollow cheeks and glazed look.

The care of the train took up all his time. Whatever other thoughts Danilov might have had—his job was always there and demanded his attention. He felt that in the hospital train there was still a lot that needed to be done. He probed into all the details of its life and listened to what people were saying. Sobol kept doing sums. Danilov began to do the same. He calculated that they spent not more than ten days a month on the transport of wounded. The rest of the time they were either stationary or going empty; the unit, idle for lack of anything to do, just stared out of the windows and gossiped.

Julia Dmitriyevna emphasized the importance of studying. That was all right, but still, they weren't there to study at leisure ...

One day they were stationed next to another hospital train. They watched from the windows all that went on in that other strange train. Two nurses were laughing and chattering and sewing at the same time. In the staff train three men without pullovers, in their shirt sleeves—played billiards. The devils! thought Danilov as he looked at them—they've taken away the partition between the compartments in order to put in the billiard-table.

Between the trains a transport repair brigade passed quickly:—a few young lads and two girls in men's black oily leather coats.—These children are repairing our trains, thought Danilov, while hefty men knock about billiard balls twenty days out of thirty. And I stand and watch them do it. But if we were able to repair our coach as we did, he went on to himself, could we not manage the current repairs as well? We have all sorts of experts among our men. Is it possible that we are unable to master the work that is being done for us by these

children? He began to calculate: if every hospital train in wartime carried out current repairs with the help of its own unit—what a help it would be for transport.

And it would be fine for us, he thought. We should not have to wait for weeks. Our stoppings would be curtailed. We'd make more trips. Yes, it's simple enough and we ought to get on to it at once.

He did not linger. Obtaining the permission of the chief, he put the question at the next unit meeting. Here he suddenly met with an obstacle.

"I cannot help feeling doubtful about one point," said Suprugov. "It has not been properly examined. Aren't we giving our people too much to do? It is no secret that during the full-loaded trips our staff work unbelievably hard. They *must* rest from time to time. And when should that be if not on the empty trips? This matter should be carefully considered, comrades."

Danilov looked at Suprugov, eyes wide open, mouth gaping with surprise. What? This quiet, always acquiescing doctor was openly going against him? Was it a dream? He was speaking softly, but clearly. People were listening to him. There was Doctor Belov fidgeting on his chair and putting something down on his pad. There was fat Iya propping up her head sadly with her hand—probably sorry for herself for having worked beyond human endurance. ... Had Danilov been paying more attention to Suprugov, he would have long ago noticed a change in him. But Danilov wasn't interested in Suprugov and had failed to notice the difference. It had happened after Pskov. After Pskov Suprugov suddenly became aware that he wasn't just Suprugov—ear, throat and nose—but a military doctor of 3rd rank, participating actively in historical battles, and in addition, if considering the matter impartially, without false pride—participating heroically. He was hurt that people seemed not to notice it and to ignore him. For instance, there was that trifling matter of Kravtsov mending some pipes noted at the meeting, yet nobody even mentioned Suprugov's exceptional behaviour in the streets of Pskov.

So he wanted to proclaim his valour, make it understood that he meant something in the unit, that his opinion had weight and had to be listened to. That feeling was so strong that it overcame his normal commonsense. He asked for the right to speak with the same faltering heart as that of an inexperienced swimmer when he takes a high dive: a desire to dive and fear at the same time—what if he should drown? ... One moment it seemed he had already: lightning flashed in Danilov's eyes. Suprugov gave a spasmodic jerk and struck out.

Yes, he had his head above water now, Doctor Belov was nodding affirmatively and Julia Dmitriyevna had on her face an expression of deep thought which did not improve her looks at all. Danilov was silent. He wanted to listen to them all. Suprugov's statement was a stone thrown into the water. The circles would follow. And they came.

"Please note," said Protassov "that the question of the repairs is on the agenda of the general meeting of the unit. If it were in accordance with the regulations, there would be no general meeting, just an order, and that's all. There is no such thing in the regulations that the hospital personnel should crawl under the trains and have no rest, that's the railway's job, I can confirm this to you as an old railwayman."

Danilov kept silent.

"We should surrender to discipline without a murmur, comrades," Goremykin said in an offended voice. "If the chief tells me: Goremykin, lie down under the train, I must lie down without a word. If I am told to paint lavatories, I will paint them, even if it is not mentioned in the regulations that a soldier should paint lavatories. Our job—is just discipline."

Sukhoyedov got up.

"Comrade Commissar," he said in the halting voice of a sufferer from asthma, "Permit me to say that you have put the question in the right way, from a Government point of view. I pay no heed to the statements of Comrades Goremykin and Protassov. Their statements

have no political foundation. We should not listen to them with the situation at the front as it is and when the interests of the country are involved."

"You sodden lout," Kravtsov suddenly said, looking at Protassov with disgust, "If we can do another job besides our own, why not do it, if we don't who else will?"

Protassov turned away and frowned as though he'd been slapped on the face. "All you want is to sleep and to soak vodka, you useless sluggard. ..."

Danilov rose.

"Comrades!" he said quickly, glancing swiftly at Suprugov. "You did not quite get my meaning. I was not proposing to include the medical personnel in repair works. I was proposing to create a permanent repair unit from among our experts. And if any of our medical personnel should volunteer to lend a hand during an empty trip, do you really think that it will be detrimental to your care of the wounded? Do you really, comrades?" he asked gently and with solicitude and knew very well what the answer would be. The girls shouted at once: "No, no, it will not!" and Julia Dmitriyevna straightened herself out and Doctor Belov sat on his chairman's seat with more satisfaction and reassurance. The question was immediately settled, easily, unanimously.

From that day Danilov began to watch Suprugov more carefully. But he did not notice anything special. Suprugov retired into his shell and behaved in his former tentative and careful manner.

"Why did he come out like that at the meeting?" Danilov asked himself and could not find an answer. Finally he discovered it: Suprugov was fishing for popularity among the personnel. One day he found him in the staff carriage. Suprugov was telling a story. Danilov stopped to listen: they were old anecdotes. The men laughed readily.

"Maybe one should let them go to a show or two," thought Danilov.

It was then that the idea occurred to him that Suprugov was not loth to have the personnel on his side. Well, why not? Better amuse the men than sit like an owl in his compartment.

Another day, he got very angry. They were again in Kirov, during an empty trip. They were not stationed for long and when the order came to go, it turned out that there was not one nurse on the train. Suprugov had on his own initiative allowed them to go to the cinema. The departure was delayed for three hours. Danilov wanted the chief to reprove Suprugov in an official report, but Dr Belov, out of kindness, refused.

"You see, all he wanted was to give them some fun," the doctor said in his conciliatory way, "They are of an age when all this—the cinema, dancing, a play, is needed like fresh air. Maybe he didn't know we'd be going off so quickly. We ought to have warned him, don't you think?"

Danilov did not wish to argue with the chief but on leaving him he went to Suprugov and said:

"Doctor. If you issue another order to the unit without my or the chief's permission, you will be transferred to another unit with a lot of unpleasantness. I can guarantee that—both the transfer and the unpleasantness. Understood?"

Suprugov listened, raising his eyes from the book he was reading. He followed Danilov out of the room with his slow glance.

Doctor Belov received news about Igor.

A letter arrived from Leningrad—the only one during the whole of that time. It was dated September 5, and the doctor received it on January 1, New Year's Day. Sonechka wrote that she was feeling depressed, but that he should not worry about her—a splendid bomb shelter had been built under their house. She asked who washed his clothes and how his kidney stones were. (The kidney stones—heavens, he had not even thought about them from the time he had been called up!)

A letter had come from Igor the previous day, Sonechka wrote. He had left Pskov with a tank unit and would not return home until the Germans were defeated. "I was not surprised by the letter," Sonechka wrote. "But I was surprised at my reaction to it. Three months ago, I went crazy with anxiety if Igor did not come home at night. And now I did not even cry."

Lyalya wrote a note at the bottom, saying that her mother was splendid, and she, Lyalya, was now working in a military hospital as registrar. Lyalya thoroughly approved of what Igor had done, only she was sorry he had not come home to say good-bye.

There were no more letters.

When the first alarming news came of the siege, and of starvation beginning in Leningrad, the doctor was frantic. His food stuck in his throat, and even when he was hungry, he could swallow nothing. ... Danilov helped him over this time.

"Is your family in Leningrad, or have they left?" he asked.

"No," the doctor replied, "they haven't gone, you know, somehow, we never thought about it."

"We might manage to send a parcel," said Danilov.

He could manage anything. By some complicated route, through a friend whose daughter was married to an airman, a parcel was sent to Sonechka's address in Leningrad containing rusks, flour, butter and all kinds of things. The doctor did not know if the parcel would ever arrive. It was best to think that it would. And on the day when he sent it, he felt as though he had just fed Sonechka and Lyalya with rusks and butter till they could eat no more. He collected sugar, biscuits and other dainties which he got from Sobol, and waited for the time when he felt he could ask Danilov to arrange for another parcel to be sent.

Many days passed, and still there were no more letters from Leningrad. Twice in those months the hospital train received mail, but it contained nothing for Dr Belov.

He was naturally optimistic. He was worried, of course, but not too much so. The situation in Leningrad had improved somewhat, more people were being evacuated from the city, he himself had seen one train-load. ... It was terrible, God how terrible it was. Exhausted, wasted people with starvation diarrhoea. Children looking old and wizened. ... But Sonechka and Lyalya had food. Ivan Egorych had sent it. They could not have starvation diarrhoea. It was simply that the letter had not come yet.

Perhaps they had left Leningrad before the siege began. Sonechka was always so capable. ... And now perhaps they were living quietly somewhere in the Urals. And Lyalya was plump and rosy as she had always been.

Soon a letter would come. Of course, of course it would. It would come with the next mail—a whole pile of letters. Perhaps there would be one from Igor. His mother had sent him the address, and he would write to his father. Their ways would not lie apart for ever. ... He was a sensible boy, he would grow up, he would understand that he could not wound his father so. Sonechka would bring them together again.

Oh, when would it come, that day when all four of them would be sitting together in the small dining room, with the lamp shining on their dear faces under its shade with the torn strings of beads! Would that day ever come?

"Yes, it will come," the calm, well-built commanding figure of Danilov seemed to assure him. "Can there be any question of it?" he read in the raised brows and proud calm of Julia Dmitriyevna. "Why, of course it will!" said Lena's sweet, untroubled, mischievous face. Only Suprugov conveyed no assurance: who knows—perhaps; and then again, perhaps not. ...

If anybody asked Danilov what education he had had, he replied—elementary.

That was quite true—he had come from a peasant family, had never left the village until he was eighteen

and had been to the elementary school, where the curriculum consisted of writing, arithmetic and religious study; all of these subjects had been taught by one and the same village teacher. And yet it was not true, because from the time of the Revolution, he had studied almost continuously. He had been taught by the Communist Youth League, the Party, the Red Army. He had studied in special schools, at courses, in circles. The courses sometimes lasted for ten to fifteen days, and the circles went on for years.

It might have seemed that he was always up to the ears in work, that he had no time left for study, but nevertheless he was always learning something, and actually knew a great deal.

He was a practical agronomist, a practical veterinary surgeon, a practical builder, he was carpenter, fitter, blacksmith, he knew book-keeping and commerce.

When he was working in the country, he had read a great many books on agriculture. Now, in the hospital train he started on medical textbooks. He wanted to understand the essence of the matter. Dr Belov gave him Pirogov's Textbook, and Danilov opened the thick volume with respect and a secret awe—would he not find the eminent surgeon's language too technical for him? But from the very first page the book delighted him by its lucidity, its passionate earnestness and its topical interest. It appeared that even in the days of the defence of Sevastopol, in 1854, people had been thinking of the same things that occupied him, Danilov, in 1942—the better organization of the transport of wounded to the rear.

Of course, within ninety years the technique of evacuating the wounded had gone ahead. If only Pirogov could have seen these hospital trains, that dispensary coach, the modern surgical instruments. ... But nevertheless, not everything was accomplished. There was a great deal that was new and good to be done. And as usual, Danilov's hands itched to be working on the new and the good.

Suddenly he took a dislike to the train. It had become grey and unattractive, even the Krieger. He did not realise the reason for this straight away. Then it dawned upon him: the linen. After delivering the patients to the hospital, the dirty linen was removed from the cots and sent to the town laundry where it was exchanged for clean. The laundries were under-staffed, they laundered badly. Often torn sheets would be substituted for good ones.

Why have you got such white linen in the dispensary?" Danilov asked Julia Dmitriyevna.

"Because Klava launders for the dispensary," she answered. "You don't think I could put on a dirty overall or give one to the doctor, do you?"

"And do you think that a wounded man likes to lie down on dirty sheets?" he asked.

"I have already been thinking," said Julia Dmitriyevna, disregarding his sarcasm, "that it would be a good thing if we did all the laundering ourselves."

"If you had been thinking it," he said disapprovingly, "why did you keep silent about it? You should speak."

"Very well," she said, "I've been thinking a lot about our train. I think it could be much better equipped than it is. We need a laundry and even more than that—a disinfecting room for soft articles."

He nodded. A disinfecting room: that's an important thing for a train. He had often witnessed blankets and warm dressing gowns being brought from the sanitary centre. They were first brought in lorries to the stations and then delivered by hand which sometimes entailed crawling with them under stationary trains along the lines. Very often they arrived all stained in oil or coal dust—and the guilty could never be traced. Sobol and Bogeichuk complained that the lorries were hard to get and if they *did* get them, it was only due to Sobol's resourcefulness.

"I will tell you one thing," Sobol once said to Danilov, "believe it or not, but my heart breaks when I think of the refuse."

"The refuse?" said Danilov.

"Yes, the refuse in the kitchen." Sobol uttered this in a faint voice and closed his eyes. Danilov glanced at him with renewed interest.

"A huge amount of stuff—vegetable peel, pails of food remains, the greasy water left from washing-up—all is being thrown down the slope."

"Well, what do you propose to do?" asked Danilov.

"What do I propose?" said Sobol, well aware that his statement would be welcome and beginning to be coy about it. "We could feed animals, for instance."

"But Sobol, where could we do it? We live on wheels, as you know."

"Feed the animals on wheels, of course, comrade Commissar."

Having weighed Sobol's offer, Danilov gave his consent and persuaded Dr Belov. "Fresh meat would be very useful on hospital rations," he said.

In the luggage van, at the end next to the refrigerator van a corner was allotted to two pigs. An old soldier, Kostritsyn, who knew a thing or two about agriculture was appointed to look after them.

"Never mind, comrade Commissar, we'll overcome all the difficulties," said Sobol. And smiling happily, he promised: "We may even start a hen-farm."

They did. They got twenty hens and a cock. They were lodged in a special cage under the train, invented by Sobol. Dr Belov looked at them and said: "They won't be able to live like that. They have to walk on the earth."

"Comrade Chief," replied Sobol, "every damned hen walks on the earth—what *these* hens must learn is to lay eggs in different conditions."

He admitted afterwards to Danilov that he awaited the first egg with awe—he doubted very much that the hens would lay in a moving train. "Now I believe that it even encourages them," he said, holding the first warm egg on his palm.

During the long days when the train was running

empty, when it had delivered its wounded to the hospital and had left the far hinterland to go back and fetch another load, in these days small every-day cares found their way into people's consciousness. But when it was time to load, everything changed. Sobol did not dare to pester the commissar about the pigs, even he, Sobol, did not bother much about them ... All the men, or almost all, experienced a feeling of responsibility and earnestness, of a contact with this Something great, terrible and stern, which had ordained that they should collect in this train and live as they lived, for months and years, until the day of victory. War entered the wards where every fold on the beds had been so tenderly smoothed out; it brought its tumult, speaking in groans, banging with crutches. Tobacco smoke rose in a dozen thin spirals to the ceiling. Blankets were twisted, pillows tumbled. The odour of pus, sweat, and men's strong breath conquered the smell of disinfectants. ... The train was running loaded. ...

CHAPTER VI

FROM WEST TO EAST

LENA worked conscientiously.

She cleaned and tidied the coach, helped the wounded in and out of their clothes, assisted at dressing wounds, brought dinners, and read the newspapers aloud, stumbling slightly over the names of foreign towns.

The patients were fond of her. The older men called her "daughter," and stroked her bobbed head. The young ones said:

"What a wife she'd make!"

She tidied up after them patiently, and persuaded them to eat porridge, the very sight of which made many of them furious.

"I'm surprised at you," she would say. "You're just like children. It's one of the most nourishing things possible, if you want to know. I'll ask the dietitian how many calories it contains."

"You go along to your dietitian," they would bawl. "Let her eat her calories herself, instead of giving us oats, what does she think we are—horses?"

But when they said goodbye to her, they would shake her hand for a long time, and look at her affectionately, and ask:

"Give me your address, Sister, I want to write to you, I'll never forget you."

"I'm not giving you any address," she would answer. "You won't write anyway, and if you do I shan't answer, I don't like writing letters."

Although she did not like writing, she wrote many letters—and all to the same address, the same field post office.

You keep on writing and writing, and it is as though you threw them into some bottomless well, instead of a letter box. And the well gives back no reply. It was only

after three or four months, when the train came to the place where it was registered that the mail was brought in—in envelopes and without envelopes, folded triangles, postcards, and military forms with red stars upon them.

After receiving a letter, Lena seemed to be illumined by some inner glow, she felt she could hear his voice in her ears, a manly voice vibrating with tenderness.

... It was a hot, dry summer. Black dust drifted in through the open windows to settle on the white curtains, the sheets, the bandages and the overalls. The nurses' work was doubled—they continually had to be shaking out curtains and bedding, washing the floor, and wiping down the tables, frames and walls with wet cloths. ... The wounded wilted in the heat and lost appetite.

They had just taken on a load from the hospital and were carrying them east, to the Urals. There were twenty men in the Krieger coach, where Lena worked. They were capricious, they smoked, they refused to drink boiled water—asked for fresh water with ice in it. No. 17—an amputation case, the left leg taken off at the knee—did not smoke and demanded nothing, but that was almost worse. He neither ate nor slept. His face, dark bronze against the white pillow, had sharpened, and never lost a look of loathing. Olga Mikhailovna bent over him and talked to him gently, in motherly tones.

"Why don't you eat anything? Don't you like the food?"

"The food's all right, thank you," No. 17 replied through set teeth.

"Maybe you'd prefer something else? Fresh eggs? Curd cakes? Dumplings with berries? Tell us what you'd like and we'll make it."

"Thank you, I don't need anything."

There were a hundred and nine seriously wounded waiting for Olga Mikhailovna. A hundred and nine problems, hundreds of instructions, hundreds of complaints from the wounded—about the heat, the porridge, the cruelty of the sister who wouldn't give them un-

boiled water; hundreds of complaints from the sisters about the wounded—they quarrelled, they refused to take their medicine, they wanted a draught through the coach. ...

Olga Mikhailovna read No. 17's case book and said: "You're a sailor, Comrade Glushkov, you should pull yourself together."

"I used to be a sailor," said No. 17.

Lena gazed at him. The sunburned face with the white forehead and black eyes reminded her of her husband.

"Lena!" said Olga Mikhailovna. "Straighten the lieutenant's pillow."

She went on to the next case. Lena raised the pillow and looked into angry, tormented black eyes. ...

"You're called Lena?" asked Glushkov.

"Yes," she replied.

He looked at her, and his eyes softened.

"Little Snubnose," he said, and stopped short. "My sister's called Lena. ..." And fell silent.

She was called away to another bed. She gave the men bedpans, persuaded them to drink boiled water, wiped away dust with a wet cloth, straightened bedding, and when the train stopped, ran out at their request to buy them a bucket of raspberries. A jolly captain, a stout man in a plaster-of-Paris cast, divided the raspberries with many jests and gave Lena a jarful.

At dinner time she came to Glushkov again.

"Eat something!" she said. "This is a special dinner, the assistant doctor ordered it for you. Mutton with tomatoes. And there'll be curd cakes for supper. Eat something!"

"I'll eat, I'll eat," he said impatiently, and put a fragment of tomato into his mouth. "Stop here a bit, Little Snubnose, don't go away, you always keep going away. I'll eat if you stop here."

"All right," she said, and sat down beside him.

"But you are not eating," she said a little later. "You're only pretending. You've got to eat."

"So as to live, is that it?" asked Glushkov.

"Why of course. So as to live."

"I lied about my sister," said Glushkov. "She isn't my sister. We wanted to get married. Now she'll find somebody else. ... Well, to hell with all that. That's the least of it. ... Eat that special mutton, if you want. I don't want it."

"It's yet to be seen that she'll find somebody else," said Lena.

"Well, it's all one to me whether she does or not. ... I shan't go back." He ground his teeth. "A cripple, a repulsive thing like that. ... Coming along on a peg-leg ... damn those Fritzes. I'll send for Mother. We'll live somewhere else. Mothers are ready to live anywhere. ..."

"Not repulsive at all," said Lena, staring at some point straight in front of her. "I don't see that it's repulsive. As for your mother, and for anybody else, you're just as dear without a leg as with it. And you're not in such a bad way, if you want to know. You're still able to work, you're just as good-looking as ever, you're young, you can learn anything, you can get married—you've got all your life before you. And you won't have a peg-leg, you'll get a good artificial leg, you'll wear boots, there'll be nothing to be seen. ..."

He closed his eyes and fell silent. And she rose and went to the other end of the coach, because she suddenly felt that she wanted terribly to stroke Glushkov's shaved head. To lay her hand on his brow, which was so white above the line of sunburn. Danya. ...

The long hot day at last burned itself out. The evening bustle came to an end—supper, treatment, straightening the beds for the night. For the last time Olga Mikhailovna passed through the coach and put out the lights, leaving only one burning over the table where the sister on duty sat. ... Lena went quietly back and forth along the thick drugget. The coach was without divisions, roomy, comfortable, with chaise-longues and little tables—it would have been exactly like a hospital ward, had it not been for the second, upper row of hanging beds.

Ten beds on the right, ten on the left; five above, five below on either side. On each pillow—a shaved head, a sunburned face. ... The lamp with its blue shade shed a pale light on those dark faces, closed eyes and lips pressed together in sleep. Only Glushkov was not asleep. Every time Lena passed she could see his eyes shining.

She wanted to talk to him, but she was afraid. Why was it that she had so nearly touched that white forehead above the bronzed features?

"I'm just sorry for him," she said to herself. "I want to comfort him, like a sister. ... He's like Danya.

"I'll go to him, stroke his face. Just a little. Nothing special about that, if it's only a little. ... After all, I'm not in love with him! Not a scrap. If he's sent to hospital to-morrow it'll be all one to me."

And that was true.

"I'll go, I'll go. He's got black eyes. He talked gently. I'll be friendly, tender to him, and he'll be the same to me. I'll go right now and talk to him. Talk to him, to distract him from all those thoughts. I'll even lay my hand on his forehead. ... As a sister would."

She went to Glushkov. But he was asleep.

His face was tormented. He was breathing gently like a child.

She stood there, watching the quiet rise and fall of his chest under his shirt. She forced herself to think: "What a good thing that he's fallen asleep," but in the depths of her heart she was sorry, even felt injured.

Suddenly he sobbed—a prolonged sob, almost a groan. Probably he had been crying before he fell asleep. He had been crying, and she had not noticed it.

Dawn was beginning to break—summer nights are short.

"I won't show tenderness to anybody, except one, the only one in the world for me. He's my husband, I saw him off to the war, he went away believing in me. Danya, go on believing in me, my dearest. You're the only one I want. That's just a brother sleeping there—I have a thousand brothers like that. ... But Danya,

why must all this be—wounds and suffering, these beds, these bedpans, and all this longing, when life was so wonderful, so full of happiness. ...”

A call from the other end of the coach: “Nurse!”

“Coming!” she called back, and with a light step answered the call.

Kramin was in bed No. 18, above Glushkov. He was a small, sickly man with a shining bald head and a sharp-featured, dry, humorous face. His round eyes in their thick-rimmed glasses made his features even sharper. In fact he looked exactly like an owl.

His spine was injured, and both his legs paralysed, and suffering had dried him up until he was as light as a child. For what remained of his life he would have to go on crutches. Sometimes he would fling back the quilt, and survey his thin, yellow, withered legs, with lower lip pushed out.

When he was brought into the coach he asked for books.

“As many as possible, please,” he said.

Lena brought him everything she could find in the train’s meagre library—Eugene Onegin, Zoshchenko’s humorous stories, a single number of a 1939 magazine and another book which had to remain nameless because the first and last pages had been used for cigarette paper.

“Delightful,” said Kramin.

He read them all through on the very first day. He lay on his back holding the book low down over his face. His head moved from left to right and back again as his eyes followed the lines, but he read remarkably quickly. He seemed to be gobbling up the books like a hungry chicken pecking grain.

It was the custom in the train to put a book on the table by each cot before loading a fresh contingent of wounded. Kramin soon read all there was to read. Rumours spread the whole length of the train about this man who swallowed in one hour a book which would have lasted anyone else for the whole trip. Danilov,

Doctor Belov, the nurses brought Kramin their own books. And Kramin with the same speed and concentrated interest read Pirogoff's book on surgery, *The Crocodile Magazine* and *Sources of Happiness* which Faïna brought to him.

When there were no more books, he took off his glasses, folded his arms behind his head (he was obviously delighted that he could still do all he wished with his arms) and began to join in the general conversation.

He was not talkative, but would throw in short remarks here and there.

Kramin found everything delightful.

"Delightful porridge!" he said, returning an empty bowl to Lena and laughing with his very light, almost colourless eyes. And about *Sources of Happiness* he said: "A fine book."

"Really?" Faïna was glad that a clever man had praised a book that was mocked by the train staff.

"Certainly," said Kramin.

They didn't bother him unduly with dressings. Sometimes he very quietly and politely asked for a shot of morphine, and it was given to him willingly. He would have to spend a long time in various hospitals, before he could even move about on crutches.

Kramin had been a consulting lawyer at one of the biggest Leningrad factories, generally considered a lover of books and theatres, and something of a sybarite. His wife was a wonderfully beautiful woman.

His friends had been amazed, they had even refused to credit it when the rumour flew round that he had refused exemption, joined up and was studying at a junior lieutenants' course.

In the end they had to believe it, when one of them met him on the Nevsky, in uniform.

He was one of the first to finish the course, got his platoon, and for a month carried out minor patrol assignments. He got things done, but his superior officers did not place too much reliance on him. His puny appearance did not inspire confidence.

Terrible days began for Leningrad. The Germans captured Gatchina, Pushkin, Krasnoye Selo. In those country retreats where he used to go for the summer Kramin now went out on patrol with his men. His wife he had sent away from Leningrad during the summer.

One day the commander of the battalion summoned him.

"You will have to give up the command of the platoon to Lieutenant Nikolaev," he said, looking straight into Kramin's eyes.

"May I know why?" asked Kramin.

"Because your platoon will be sent to the Dubrovka."

Dubrovka was the name of a plot of land on the left bank of the Neva, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres long and about 700 metres wide that our troops had captured from the Germans and that they wanted to strengthen and widen. The Germans kept this spot of land and all its approaches under constant artillery and machine-gun bombardment.

"This is very nice," said Kramin, "But why should I give up the command to Nikolaev?"

"It's orders from the regimental commander." In these days such conversation between superior and junior officer was still possible. Apparently the battalion commander was angry, he looked at last with a frown into Kramin's eyes.

"You're not the right stuff for Dubrovka," he said with familiar, brusque directness. "All these little jokes and things ... We need a tougher lot for it." Kramin grew pale.

"Comrade battalion commander," he said. "Allow me to inform you that for more than a month I have been training my soldiers up to the idea that we might all have to die together. All together, do you understand? And now, suddenly, they go and I remain behind! That's impossible! It is like having one's face slapped on parade." His voice became thin and piercing from emotion. The commander was a regular soldier. He understood.

"Right you are," he said without much enthusiasm. "You'll go with the platoon."

One dark, moonless, rainy night, Kramin crossed the Neva with the men. During the crossing, nineteen of them were killed by German shells. Kramin left the right bank a platoon commander, and climbed the left bank a company commander—two platoon commanders had been killed at the crossing. The remnants of their men joined Kramin's, thus forming a company *en route*.

Along trenches half-filled with corpses, Kramin crawled into the heart of territory captured from the enemy. German rockets soared above Dubrovka, German machine guns sprayed the trench parapet. Throughout the next day, Kramin and his men hugged the cover of those trenches, with a barrage raging around them. In the evening he received his orders—to attack at nightfall.

Crawling, moving from trench to trench, he brought out his company. Rain was still falling. Dubrovka was literally under fire and water. A man whose nerve failed him, who refused to leave the trench, Kramin shot.

They attacked, took seven prisoners, and when they were already returning, Kramin received the wound in the spine which crippled him for life. Two of his men, a Russian and an Uzbek, dragged him along the trench piled with dead until they reached the bank, where a field dressing station had been set up under a steep fall of land, sheltered from shells. From there Kramin was taken unconscious across the river. For some time he was kept in a hospital near the front, then sent to Leningrad. And that was the end of his army life.

In the Leningrad hospital all the windows were destroyed by bombardment and replaced by planks and plywood. It was impossible to read. Kramin did not wish to remain day after day alone with his pain. He sent little notes to all his friends, all those he could remember. And he got what he asked for: a ruler and a ream of paper. (He had asked precisely for a ream.) He began to write.

He put the ruler on the paper and wrote above the ruler. When he came to the end of the line, he brought the ruler a little lower down. The lines turned out to be rather regular.

He wrote ironical letters to his wife and friends, and parodies of the verses that he heard on the radio. He was hard to please—he thought all these verses poor.

The parodies were good and gave him much amusement. He was not troubled by the bombs. After Dubrovka they did not seem at all terrible. He stood the pain well. The cold was bitter; the wounded lay in sweaters, woollen caps, sometimes woollen gloves. Kramin would have preferred to lie only in his shirt, he was used to it. He was not allowed to do so.

He knew that around him people died of hunger. Himself he stood hunger in the same way that he stood the pain in his spine: he melted away like a candle and went on writing comic letters.

One woman, the wife of a friend, brought him a valuable parcel: a few baked potatoes, a glass of honey and some salad oil in an old scent bottle. This woman whom he had known as a feather-headed fashionable creature came to him, wrapped in a dirty shawl, with shabby men's felt boots and seemed thirty years older. He was touched. He kissed her hand and wrote her an affectionate letter without any sarcasm.

Kramin had no desire to write in the train, he was content to read and talk.

The people about him were quiet and made no fuss. The staff were polite and careful—evidently somebody had them well in hand. Particularly charming was the gay simple-hearted woman with the tight curls who had been so delighted when he praised *Sources of Happiness*.

He liked the feeling of going somewhere. He had always loved travelling, and been to a great many places. He had even tried to join an Arctic expedition going on an icebreaker, but just then he had fallen in love; there had been romance, marriage and the Arctic had been postponed.

Now, of course, he would never be able to go to the Arctic.

Never mind.

He was travelling, the familiar peaceful landscape swept past the windows, he re-read the familiar books, he did everything that fate had left him to do.

It was not the custom in the train to tell the men their route. This wily tactic of the command was the result of bitter experience from their first trips. It was enough to hint that the train would pass through, say, Moscow, and immediately there would be a dozen Moscow men demanding that they be left there. Everybody wanted to convalesce in his own town. Scandalous incidents occurred—attempts were made to escape from the train. So the route was kept secret.

But Kramin was not to be deceived. He knew railway geography too well. On the third day, he called Danilov.

"Comrade Commissar," he said quietly, "we're going through Sverdlovsk."

"Nothing of the kind," said Danilov. "You're mistaken."

"I've a request to make you," said Kramin. "My wife's in Sverdlovsk. I do beg you to let her know that we're going through the town. I would like so much to see her. Here's the address. If it's not putting you to too much trouble, I should be extremely grateful."

"But you're wrong, I tell you," said Danilov. However, he took the address and sent off the telegram.

Another of the men in the coach was Kolka.

In his case book he had the dignified appellation of Nikolai Nikolayevich. But the whole coach called him Kolka.

He was eighteen years old, he had volunteered for the front, distinguished himself near Vyazma, been wounded, recovered, returned to the front, distinguished himself near Orel, been wounded there, and was now being sent to the far rear for a thorough course of treatment.

He already had two decorations, and was to receive a third. He spoke about them with naïve pleasure, sure that everybody would share in his gladness and regard him with unfailing benevolence.

"Oh, Kolka, Kolka," said the stout captain in the plaster-of-Paris cast. "By the end of the war you'll have a sample of every decoration; here, take some raspberries."

Kolka ate the raspberries and licked his fingers. Kramin shared his sugar with him, because the daily ration was never enough for Kolka.

Just what it was that had earned him his decorations, he could never tell coherently. He'd run and fired. He'd crawled and fired. He'd sat still and fired. He didn't understand about tactics, he just did his job and did it well, that could be seen from his decorations and by the way he spoke.

"Evidently you had a good commander," remarked the captain, after listening to him attentively, "without a good commander you'd have been nowhere."

Kolka came from the Vorenezh Region. Three years previously he had finished the seven-year school, and worked in the collective farm as head of a youth brigade. Kramin asked him why he had volunteered instead of waiting to be called up.

"They tried to break up the collective farms," said Kolka, "and give the land to landlords."

He said it without any heat, as simply as though he were talking of a mad dog, and said that it was mad.

According to Kolka, the Germans weren't so very terrible, there was no need to be afraid of them.

"They just wanted to scare us stiff, and with what?—Motor-cycles. Three hundred men on motor-cycles rushing along the road. Three hundred or perhaps four ... Roar and rattle, and smoke, and heading straight for you. If a fellow's got weak nerves, he may get scared. But what's terrible about motor-cycles? I dreamt of buying one before the war."

"And now?" asked the captain. "Don't you still want one?"

"Now!" said Kolka. "I'll get one for nothing now."

He had a clear childlike face which had never known a razor. He was the only one in the whole coach who felt awkward over his nakedness and his helplessness with so many women around, and his blue eyes would rest on Lena with thoughtful perplexity. He was shy, but at the same time could not refrain from talking about himself, and did so without any fear that the grown men might be laughing at him.

"The worst moment was when I was wounded the first time," he said. "Not used to it. I even felt sick with fright—thought I was going to die."

"Afraid of dying, were you?"

"No!" Kolka replied. "I felt mad at the thought of dying when I'd seen nothing of life yet. Nothing," he repeated staring in front of him sternly and challengingly.

A dum-dum bullet had wounded him in both legs. Gangrene had set in in the hospital, but his powerful constitution had come to the aid of medicine, and the infection had been overcome. Now Kolka considered himself quite well. With the help of a nurse, he could walk to the dispensary for dressings. He liked to sit in a chaise-longue, his big boyish hands on his knees. There was a dignity and confidence in his pose that had nothing childlike about it. "I have done something, and I shall do more, depend upon it," said his whole figure—his full-lipped, blue-eyed face.

Dr Belov liked to come into coach eleven and listen to Kolka talking. No, of course, Igor was not like that, not a bit. His face was different, and his character. "Igor's a hot-house plant, while Kolka's as transparent, clean and fresh as a wild flower," thought the doctor. But Igor was a lad like Kolka, even younger, and the doctor liked to look at Kolka.

Danilov, a white overall pulled clumsily over his set

shoulders, was sitting beside Glushkov, telling him the contents of the day's communiqué. Moving into the centre of the coach, he began tracing a map of the Black Sea and the Crimea on the drugget with the toe of his boot. The Germans were breaking through to the Crimea.

"Of course it's hard to say how things will go," said Danilov. "But in any case, he's going to break a few teeth on Sevastopol."

"He"—that was Fritz, the German, Hitler, the Fascist, the enemy.

"Yes, history will accord Sevastopol a second Order," said the captain in the plaster-of-Paris cast.

They talked about Moscow, about Leningrad, about their gallant defence.

As Danilov spoke, he kept turning to Glushkov, as though inviting him to take part in the conversation.

But Glushkov only opened his tight lips to say wearily: "Our towns defend themselves splendidly."

"The German is coming to the end of his tether," said the captain. "That's a fact."

"I'm waiting all the time to see where he'll trip up," said a pale, handsome, hook-nosed Georgian, wounded in the head, from an upper berth. "I've been looking at the atlas trying to foretell where we'll start driving him back." He spoke with a slight accent, and laughed at the idea of his fortune-telling.

"A map's no good for fortune-telling," mused the captain. "Now in Penza I heard a fortune-teller—wonderful how exact!"

Everybody burst out laughing, and Danilov prepared to go. Every morning after breakfast it was his custom to go through the coaches and tell the men the latest communiqué. As he was leaving, he laid his hand firmly on Glushkov's shoulder.

"Chin up, Comrade Lieutenant," he said in a low voice, audible to Glushkov alone. "Chin up. You've got to eat, got to sleep, got to live."

Glushkov turned incredulous eyes upon him.

"With two legs life's good," he said loudly.

"Better than with one, that's true," said Danilov. "Nobody's arguing about that. But just think a minute—where you've come from, there's many lost their lives. But you didn't. They make splendid artificial legs nowadays, your stump's healing well, you'll find walking easy. You ought to feel you're in luck."

"What's a cripple got to live for?" said Glushkov. "Better kick off at once."

"That's not right," replied a very calm, definite voice—Kramin's.

He took off his glasses and breathed on the lenses. Everybody fell silent—they all liked listening to him.

"The commissar's right," Kramin continued, wiping the glass carefully with the corner of the sheet. "Actually, you had rare good luck. You went, prepared to die ..." (he held up the glasses to the light and examined them) "and you're still alive. That is to say, you've got a second span of life. Can you think of anything to equal such a gift?"

He said no more. All waited for him to continue. At last the captain asked:

"My dear fellow—I want to follow your thought to its logical conclusion. Do you consider yourself lucky too?"

"Undoubtedly," Kramin replied.

Danilov went away. All were silent, tired with talking, and the coach seemed very quiet.

"You once asked Kolka why he volunteered for the army," said Glushkov jerkily, with a touch of hostility, addressing himself to Kramin above him. "But why did *you* go to the front?"

Kramin hung his head over the side of the bed and looked down at Glushkov.

"Excuse me," said Glushkov challengingly, "I can see you're not so young and not particularly suited for the front. Anyone can see that you're something in the scientific line. ... Why did you go? To make a gesture?"

"Well, you see, I'm a rich man," said Kramin, returning to his book. "I went to defend my property."

Lena, passing by Glushkov's cot, noticed that he was crying. His shoulders and the back of his head shook not in unison with the jolts of the train, but with its own, separate movement. The shoulders heaved spasmodically.

"Sasha," Lena called softly, leaning over him, "Sasha, what is it?"

He buried his head deep in his pillows, ashamed and at the same time glad that someone had come close and pitied him. She stroked his cropped head with both hands.

"Sasha, it's nothing, it's nothing. ..."

He turned his hot wet face to her. "They think I'm a coward."

"Sashenka, really! No one thinks that, you're imagining it, now, don't worry."

"It's something quite different. It's about the sea. That I'll never get back to it—do you understand?"

"Now be calm, my dear, be calm. A little water. ... It's nothing."

He swallowed from the cup.

"Hell," he said. "Nerves all gone wrong."

"Nerves, nerves. ... You'll get strong again and have a rest, settle down and it will all blow over. ..."

But he could not keep his tears back, turned away and pulled the blanket over his head. The commissar said: "You should be grateful that your head's where it is, you can do without a leg." The paralysed man over there said: you've had a second birth. But nobody understood that the only thing that mattered was that he would never get back to his ship.

In his eyes rose, as alive, a high wave: one wall was dark-green and smooth as glass, the other was wrinkled up in little live pleats; the crest on the top boiled and curled up. It brought coolness, salt, vastness—which made one's heart falter. ...

It was the usual, boring round: the doctor, his assistant, the nurse ... Glushkov heard their familiar, cursed words and gnawed his teeth.

"Ah, my dear fellow, you're sweating," Doctor Belov said to the captain and touched his plaster stays. A fresh stain of pus stood out on it.

"Yes, indeed, sweating, doctor," replied the captain. "Otherwise condition perfect."

"I hope there won't have to be a porthole," the doctor said anxiously.

The high wave vanished into the blue distance, playing with the wind, sparkling in the sun. What did it care for human battles and tears!

Sergeant Nifonov took no part in the general conversation in the coach. He confined himself to the most necessary words—"Yes," "No," "Give me some water." When he saw a new patient, Nifonov would ask him:

"You don't happen to know Bereza—Semyon Bereza, a machine-gunner?" and he would add regiment and company. But none of his neighbours, none of the doctors or nurses knew the machine-gunner Semyon Bereza. People asked Nifonov what he wanted with Bereza, but the sergeant did not answer, he would close his eyes and pretend to be dozing.

How good it would be to know if Bereza was alive. How fine if he was. And if he could only find out where he was now. ...

But just to talk, to chatter, merely for the sake of wagging your tongue—what was the good of that! Nothing to talk about as long as the one important thing was still uncertain. And it was this that he wanted to discuss with Semyon Bereza.

They had known each other for just ten minutes. But it seemed to Nifonov that he had never had a closer friend.

On that damned field with hot dust stopping up one's throat, a fellow from another company, a man he did not know, had been on Nifonov's right in the trench.

At first Nifonov could only see his shoulder, cap and a red ear; he was firing a machine-gun, his shoulder vibrating in time with it. Then there was a moment's silence, and the man turned and looked at Nifonov with bright blue, protruding, reckless eyes.

"Unknown pal," he said, "give me some tobacco!"

His face was black with dust. He took a pinch of tobacco from Nifonov's pouch, nodded and lit up, pressing the cigarette firmly, angrily between his hard lips.

Nifonov knew that he was hardly likely to leave this field uninjured, but he said nothing of that to his neighbour. He rolled a cigarette for himself too.

"A light," he said, and the other man held out his cigarette.

They exchanged names. A shell burst beyond the wood.

"To hell with it," said Bereza softly.

The Germans retreated, and again began pounding with their artillery. Bereza looked straight ahead, neither frowning nor starting; his stern face looked as though it had been cast in iron. Nifonov liked having Bereza's shoulder beside him—a strong, reliable shoulder. The thought came to him—fine to have a chum, a grand thing, men's friendship ... and then he ceased to think, ceased to exist—for a long time. As in a dream he remembered a certain discussion. He was in hospital, and two doctors were arguing, thinking that he was unconscious. One of them said that it would be necessary to take off both arms and legs. The other said—only the left leg. The argument continued for a long time. Nifonov was perfectly indifferent. He felt as though the real Nifonov was dead, and this Nifonov whom they were discussing was someone else, some stranger, someone unreal—let them cut off all they wanted. Even his head.

The doctors' voices sounded through a faint ringing in his ears, then the air he drew in changed to something sweet, choking, he breathed submissively and sank into a deep sleep, an everlasting sleep, it seemed. ...

He wakened. He thought that it was the pain that had awakened him, but he could not distinguish where it was. It seemed to be everywhere. Particularly in his left leg, the shattered shin-bone of his left leg. He groaned weakly, like a child—the real Nifonov would never have groaned like that. Tears of pain rolled from his eyes, the real Nifonov never cried. The old woman with glasses sitting by his bed rose and said:

“Now, thank God, he’s come to and he’s crying. Cry, son, cry, it’ll do you good.”

She went away. Another woman came to Nifonov, wiped his lips and stroked his head as though he were a little boy.

The doctors arrived. They did not argue any more, but talked quietly. The old woman in the glasses came back and gave Nifonov a glucose injection.

“Where does it hurt you, lad?” she asked.

“My leg,” said Nifonov.

“Which one?”

“The left.”

“Eh-eh-eh!” sighed the old woman.

Nifonov no longer had a left leg; he learned that the next day.

Could a thing like that happen to the real Nifonov—for a leg to hurt when it wasn’t there?

In the hospital they were proud of having saved his right leg and both arms.

“Dr Cheremnykh, he’s a wizard, and he’s not afraid of anything,” said the old woman. “He risked everything, your life and his own reputation. ‘I don’t want to leave just a stump of such a fine man,’ says he. Well, he risked it and he won. God loves a brave man. When you leave us you’ll be just ripe for a wedding!”

She winked proudly.

“Your operation’ll be written about in all the medical journals!”

Nifonov listened indifferently—what had Dr Cheremnykh’s success got to do with him? This feeble man, tortured by pain, covered with plaster of Paris and

bandages—that wasn't Nifonov. Nifonov was a skilled, highly respected worker, who knew his job inside and out, but this useless log couldn't even turn himself in his bed—a nurse had to shift him. His spine became numb from lying on his back, and an inflated rubber ring was placed under him. A man lying helplessly, able to do nothing, wanting nothing—what did it matter what happened to him—whether he died or lived?

The same old woman told Nifonov that a comrade had carried him from the battlefield. She had heard that the other man had been wounded too, but all the same he had dragged Nifonov to the field dressing station. "That was Semyon Bereza," thought Nifonov, and asked:

"Is he alive?"

"Well, as for that, lad, what I don't know I can't tell," replied the old woman.

One day they told him that he was being transferred to another hospital in another town. He was dressed, laid on a stretcher and carried outside. The fresh, clear, hot air seemed to take hold of him, blind him. The wind tore off his cap, and Nifonov had just time to catch it before it flew away.

"Careful with the plaster," cried a nurse.

Nifonov, thunderstruck, looked at his hand, which had suddenly begun to work. So it was true? So the doctor had not been lying when he had said that gradually its strength would return? He was the real Nifonov?

The fresh air made him dizzy, his ears rang, he yawned and began to doze on the stretcher. ...

The last doze, the last attack of blissful weakness. ...

In the train Nifonov roused completely. Waking, he realized that he did not want to sleep any more, and that he was very hungry. He felt himself the old, living, real Nifonov, felt his former strength coming back to him under the bandages and plaster. He lay there looking at the ceiling, narrow boards laid accurately against

each other, quite low down over the bed, well scrubbed, alabaster-white. The paint shone.

The hanging bed swung very slightly with the movement of the train, like a cradle. But nothing could lull Nifonov to sleep any more.

Why was his strength coming back to him, when he had lost a leg? The other one was still there, but he would not be able to walk—he had understood so much from the doctor's veiled talk. What was he to do with his returned strength?

There were his lathes standing at the factory, a whole row of lathes, their sharpened cutters gleaming. And he had walked among them—light, agile, and delighting in the unhurried swiftness with which the work went on.

Newspapermen would come and write all sorts of amusing things in their papers—for instance, they would reckon out how many kilometres Nifonov walked in the shop during the day.

He had good wages and a good reputation—both his father and grandfather had worked at the same factory. He had not chosen his job, he had inherited it, like the cottage where he was born and where his parents died.

He was married. ... His friends laughed—the Lord had sent Nifonov a fine family life! His wife was the chairman of the factory trade-union committee, she would come home late in the evening, look at her husband with kindly eyes fogged with weariness, and ask mechanically:

“What was it I was wanting to tell you?”

He would warm up some supper for her and pour out tea. He laughed at her, poked gentle fun at her and respected her greatly. They had two daughters who seemed to grow up by themselves. In the winter they went to school, the summer they spent in a Pioneer camp. ...

How they would all cry when they heard that he had lost a leg. The old women would all come to his wife in the factory committee groaning and moaning and try to comfort her, good simple folk. ... But all that was

nothing, nothing. There are worse things than that. It wasn't his leg, it wasn't that his wife and daughters would cry. The thing was this—what would the machine-setter Nifonov be like when he came out of the plaster, what would he be, where would he find a place in life now? Neither his wife nor his daughters, not all the wise books could answer that question. "Got to work it out for myself," thought Nifonov.

Danilov came past.

"Comrade commissar," said Nifonov.

Danilov came up to him.

"Comrade commissar," Nifonov repeated, rather awkwardly, "You don't happen to remember, haven't you had a man here—Semyon Bereza ... a machine-gunner?"

Danilov thought for a moment.

"No, I don't remember him. A relation of yours?"

"No, I just wanted to know," replied Nifonov. "He's just a man I met."

He felt that only Semyon Bereza could advise him.

The problem was this.

In the old, peaceful, happy days, Nifonov had had one small weakness of which he was almost ashamed—his accordion.

It had been left at home by his elder brother, who had been killed in World War I, and Nifonov had taught himself to play. He loved music, and had a good ear. Among the first things he learned to play were Chopin waltzes.

Before he married, he used to play at birthday parties and weddings, but his wife disapproved, she thought it was not refined. However, she allowed him to play at amateur performances at the club.

As the years passed, he didn't play so often. He was no longer a young fellow who could permit himself anything—he was becoming a respected citizen, there were articles about him in the papers, and his wife held a public position in the factory. He himself felt that his

passion for the accordion was not quite the thing. He contented himself by playing at home, when there was nobody about.

Now he lay on his bed and thought—what was there wrong with the accordion, after all? It was all Olga's prejudice. What if she is a chairman of the factory trade-union committee? Very nice indeed, let her get on with it; and I'll play the accordion.

He pictured to himself how he would come slowly on to the stage with his artificial leg and crutches. The hall falls silent, people look at his crutches ... Nifonov sits down on his chair. A pupil hands him his accordion.

Perhaps it was playing the accordion that was his real job, and not being a machine setter? Who could tell?

"So that's how it is, Olga. You'll have to live with an accordion player."

But the terrible thing was—suppose the doctor had been wrong? Suppose he were not able to use his hands properly? How wonderful to be able to use his hands and play the accordion—he had never thought before how wonderful it was. ...

However you look at it, it's rather awful, somehow, at forty, after being used to a quiet, well-ordered life, to have to start something new. If only he could have talked it all over with some close friend, a man who was bold, decided and unprejudiced. ...

"Nurse! Come here. Listen, you don't happen to remember if Semyon Bereza, machine-gunner, has ever been in this train?"

At Sverdlovsk, a very beautiful young woman came to Dr Belov and handed him a paper from the evacuation point. It announced that Junior Lieutenant Kramin was to be transferred to the Sverdlovsk hospital.

"Is he badly maimed?" she asked, and added: "I'm his wife."

"He'll have to go on crutches, you know," the doctor replied. "But he'll be able to do mental work. Absolutely. And you know," he continued, trying to find

something comforting to tell her, "it's wonderful how he keeps himself in hand."

"Yes?" she said. "That's fine."

She held herself very upright, head thrown back, and spoke quietly and calmly. Something in her lovely face reminded the doctor of Kramin. "He's probably taught her a lot," thought the doctor.

He took the lady to coach eleven, and Kramin was carried out on a stretcher. The lady stood beside the doctor, quiet and erect ... The hot sun shone on Kramin's yellow skull and thin yellow neck, and flashed on his glasses. The lady took a sudden step forward and bent over the stretcher.

Kramin gently put her aside, frowning in the bright sunshine.

"Good morning, good morning, Inochka," he said, and kissed her dark, slender, strong hand. "Let me say goodbye to the doctor."

"And he'll teach her a lot more yet," thought Belov, watching her walk along the platform beside the stretcher, saying something to her husband, her lovely head turned devotedly, submissively towards him.

CHAPTER VII

LETTERS

ON the way back from Omsk the hospital train got jammed in the stream that was moving West. The signal lights were green for the supply trains but the hospital train moved slowly, continually having to give way to the trains with war material.

In Perm it was held up eight days.

The people in the train were weary not so much because of the long trip without patients, as because on these idle days they were obsessed by thoughts of home and friends, and when would there be letters. ...

Dr Belov was the one who suffered most. It would soon be a year since he had written that letter on September 5th. The second parcel had been sent to Leningrad from Omsk, but not a sign from Leningrad.

The letters are there, of course, they are in the letter-box in V. But when will the train get to V.?

Danilov decided to send someone to fetch the post. There were many volunteers, some of the men came from V. and that meant that they might drop in and have a look at their homes. Danilov would willingly have gone himself. ...

He chose Lena.

"Like lightning—there and back," he said to her. "You'll learn at the Centre where to catch up with us. Don't try for the passenger trains, the goods trains will get you there quicker. Just do some jumping from one train to the other. But you know it all as well as I do."

He gave her a small parcel, weighing two or three pounds, neatly tied up with an addressed label tucked under the string.

"You'll leave this parcel at my house. The boy needs it, he's growing up." He frowned to hide the smile that revealed his weakness for his son.

"Have a look at him and see if he's all right. The wife writes now and then, but one can't make head or tail of her letters."

With a bagful of letters and addresses, Lena changed to the first goods train and went off.

While she was gone the days in the hospital train dragged more slowly than ever.

It occurred to Olga Mikhailovna to make jam for the wounded and dry some mushrooms. They went to the woods with pails. Julia Dmitriyevna was troubled whether Suprugov would go or not. She was delighted when he asked:

"May I come with you?"

Put the question to *her*, not to Olga Mikhailovna and Faïna who were also preparing to go, but to *her*.

She was embarrassed at first when they started walking together. She was not used to walking about in front of everybody with the man she loved. Happily Faïna came with them and several nurses. Faïna tied a yellow turban round her head and dominated the conversation. Throwing her head back she laughed, although there was nothing to laugh at. Julia Dmitriyevna was silent and the thought came to her that she, Julia Dmitriyevna, had never in her life laughed as loudly as that. And she could not produce small talk, her conversation was always instructive and serious—maybe that was what put off the men? Yes, men liked such women, brilliant and noisy, who didn't hesitate to let fall doubtful little jokes, and laughed, throwing back their heads and filling out their necks. "What can I do if I am not made that way?" ruminated the sensible Julia Dmitriyevna. But she was annoyed that Faïna had come with them.

In the woods the nurses dispersed on their own and Faïna, Suprugov and Julia Dmitriyevna remained alone. Faïna was the first to find the right mushroom spot and she shouted to Suprugov to come and help her. He was leaning against a fir-tree, smoking a hand-rolled cigarette—and to Julia Dmitriyevna he seemed particularly attractive at that moment—he appeared to be

enjoying Faïna's exuberance. He caught Julia Dmitriyevna's eye and said with a smile:

"A cheerful young woman, isn't she?" She felt happy at once: he wasn't fascinated by Faïna, he mocked her. Why, she had been sure he was infatuated ... no, it was obvious that of all the women in the train he preferred Julia Dmitriyevna. Faïna was not prepared to surrender so easily, she came and dragged Suprugov away, holding him firmly by the arm and pushing him along with her shoulder, even with her knee. ... Julia Dmitriyevna followed him, laughing to herself. Faïna's presence did not annoy her any more, on the contrary, it became an excuse for a specially friendly bond with Suprugov, for an exchange of hints and smiles the meaning of which was known to them alone. ...

Unfortunately the pleasant walk did not last long because there were great quantities of mushrooms and the pails were filled all too quickly. Faïna came to the rescue. She declared that the air in the woods was healthy and that it was unnecessary to return so soon to the stuffiness of the train. She lay down on the soft grass on the brink of the wood with the great blackness of the trees in the background, taking care to present what she considered her most attractive attitude. Julia Dmitriyevna and Suprugov modestly sat down beside her.

"Doctor," said Faïna, her eyes closed, "Tell me, are you always so half-alive?" Suprugov pretended not to understand.

"What do you mean? Half-alive?" he repeated, glancing at Julia Dmitriyevna. "I've always felt alive enough."

"Your feelings must have misled you," said Faïna with a drawl. And as he remained silent, she started at him again.

"Have you ever been in love?"

"What a strange question," replied Suprugov.

"You are a peculiar case," said Faïna. "In our days a bachelor of forty is a rare thing. They're all married,

wherever one looks. Even boys of twenty, either they're married or getting married or there is a fiancée about. Have you got a fiancée?"

"But I am not a boy," Suprugov retorted humourously.

"No, no!" shouted Faïna, turning round with childish playfulness on the grass and turning her face to him, "No, no, this is evading the question!"

Julia Dmitriyevna listened to this conversation and looked at the sky. It was beautiful at this time of day—neither blue nor gold—so high, its indefinite colour suffused with a soft comforting light.

"I feel happy," thought Julia Dmitriyevna, smiling at the sky and the conversation and the vague slight hope that was getting ready to dawn in her heart. "I feel very happy."

"What a nincompoop," said Faïna to her when they returned to the train.

Lena walked along the well-known streets. It was annoying that the tram did not work, something had happened to the lines. She wanted to reach the Centre as soon as possible and get Danya's letters. She noted automatically that there were few men about. At the stations it was different—there there were mostly men in uniform.

Now she reached the avenue, framed by large, peaceful elm-trees, and slowed down. Later she would cross the avenue, in the side-street she would find a house, the second from the corner, a three-storied grey house, the shelter of her short happiness. Here it was, exactly as it had been a year ago. Just a little more drab and the front door more like the back one and almost as if it were lower and narrower. ... No, she would go there later, she must fetch the post first.

In the Centre they gave her heaps of letters, and about two dozen parcels and newspapers. The parcels were small, Lena pushed them all into a bag. She looked swiftly through the letters—none were addressed to her.

She sat down on a bench in the dusty room and looked them through once more carefully, one by one. Here is one for Danilov—one can see by the sender's name on the other side that it's from his wife, and another one in a large envelope from the Central Committee of the Party. Here is one for Belov from Leningrad. And one for Nadia and another one and yet another—probably from the fiancé. ... Bogeichuk has about thirty letters. Some for almost everyone: none for me. ... She pushed them all into the same bag as the parcels and went home. Maybe the letters would be there. He had first written to her war-time address, then perhaps he had changed his mind and written home. She'd ask the neighbours or the house administrator. With the bag across her shoulder, very erect, not breathless, she walked quickly up the three floors. A Yale key for the door. Danya had his own, it was a faulty one and didn't open at once. Lena always heard Danya fidget with the key at the door, and on purpose did not go to open it: she liked hearing the impatient noise of the key scratching the lock.

The neighbours had no letters, they had nothing—no wood, no petrol, no soap, no thread. They surrounded Lena, these old women who sat at home, and enumerated all the things that they did not have. The young ones were all at work. Lena got rid of them and went to the house administration. They had no letters either. She took the key of her room and slowly went upstairs. Suddenly she felt dreadfully weary. For three days she had hardly slept and not undressed. In the room all the things were just where she had left them. A thick coat of dust lay on everything. The white curtains had become yellow. A half-finished cigarette was in the ash-tray. Danya's cigarette ...

Lena took off her shoes, lay down on the sofa and relaxed as she was told to do: loosen all the muscles and give rest to the whole body. She could not understand why there were no letters, but felt no anxiety. Danya was alive. The scent of his tobacco permeated the room. ... Only those people die, who have some crack in their

lives: then death crawls into that crack. But Danya had no place for death to crawl into. His life had been beautifully full, what could lay a finger on it? Danya—dead? Everyone might die, but not Danya!

Closing her eyes, she kissed him and fell asleep. Two hours later she woke up, quite rested and full of energy and began to tidy up the room. She took down the dirty curtains, wiped the dust, washed the floor. The cigarette she left in the ash-tray.

The neighbour's grandmother was fussing about in the kitchen. She was cooking something on the electric stove. Seeing Lena she quickly pulled out the plug.

"They've introduced some limit or other—won't let us use the power," she complained vaguely and carried away the little stove into her room. Lena gave her some meat-cake and a cup of tea with sugar. The grandmother drank it and complained that her grandson had eaten all the sweets.

"They live meanly, these civilians," Lena thought to herself, "Our life is better."

She had a cold bath and with relish put on a soft warm dressing gown. In that dressing gown she looked quite different, she was the same Lena that made people stop in the street to look at her. Standing in front of the mirror, she smiled to herself: "Yes, that's the way we are made," she said, lifting her left eyebrow, "that's the way—we can be this, and that, we can be as we wish to be." And then she threw off her dressing gown, because it had suddenly occurred to her that the letters might be with Katia Griasnov. Why they should be there she did not know. Her husband wasn't even very fond of Katia, he said she was a fool with bourgeois habits, but Lena believed that the letters must be somewhere and the only thing to do was to find them.

Katia met her with tears—her husband, the young man with the mandoline, had been killed, she had been notified two months ago.

"You have no idea how he loved me," sobbed Katia. "He simply worshipped me."

THE TRAIN

Lena remembered the love letters Katia's husband had sent her, and as to worshipping, it was probably the other way round. But Katia's grief was genuine and violent. She told how she had been called to the War Commissariat. They made her sit on a chair and *prepared* her. She soon understood and fainted and they gave her some water. And now she still went on grieving and would never stop. And tears flowed in streams down her fat, good-humoured cheeks.

"No letters from Danya," said Lena.

"Grief everywhere, everywhere," Katia's mother whispered next door: "It spares no one, takes everyone in turn. ..."

They had no letters, of course.

In the evening Lena went to look for Danilov's house.

The house was in the suburbs, where building had begun a short time before the war. The entrance was from the yard, the gates were closed. It had grown dark by the time she had reached the house. She knocked at a faintly-lit window.

The window opened out into the street like a village house. A curtain was drawn back. A plain woman with a shawl round her head, peered out of the window.

"A parcel from Ivan Egorich," Lena said.

"Heavens!" the woman exclaimed.

She let Lena in through the yard and across a dark kitchen into her room. A table lamp was burning next to the sewing-machine. The chairs and the sofa were littered with huge rolls of cotton wool and pieces of khaki-coloured material. In the corner of the sofa, in a funny uncomfortable position slept a child of about five, his head resting on a roll of wool.

"Sit down please," the woman said in a low, bewildered tone. "You belong to the train?"

She made Lena sit down and stood opposite her, sticking a needle into the lapel of her blouse and pulling it out again.

"How is he?" she asked, "All right?"

"Yes, he's all right."

"Did he say if there was any chance of the end being near?"

Lena failed to understand.

"What end?"

"End of the war. Everybody's had enough of it."

Lena looked at her in surprise. She had imagined Danilov's wife differently.

"No," she said, "how should he know? Here, he's sent this parcel."

"Sugar again," said Danilova, taking the parcel, "What does he do it for, he's depriving himself, and Vaniusha has enough. Tell him that we have enough, we've got out of a tight corner, tell him not to worry, as though he hadn't enough worries already. He's asleep," she said, catching Lena glancing at the child. "I had no time to undress him, he went to sleep as he was. You see, I'm working. I take work to do at home. We are making wadding for the army. I don't want to put him in a nursery, they don't feed them there too well—so I take work home. It gets me a workman's ration you see. Wait, I'll light the samovar. ..."

Lena tried to refuse.

"No, no," said Danilova, "how could I? A messenger from Ivan Egorich and I not to give you tea? No, no!" She broke some wood in the kitchen and peering through the door, said:

"Now it's all right, thank God, but when they introduced the rations I was at a loss how to pull through with Vania. It's all a question of habit: we used to do ourselves very well before the war. I didn't write to Ivan Egorich—how could he have helped? He sent me his papers—what else could he do? He saw the whole thing himself when he came one day ... Well, at first the orchard was a godsend, I would sell potatoes and buy milk and now I have a workman's ration—so all is well. Also I've got relations in the country, they send me some sour cream and I make butter from it for Vania. Merkulov helps us too, the director of the Trust, he sent

some wood last spring and promises to send more. ... Do tell him, please, that we are all right, that he shouldn't think. ..."

"Why don't you write to him yourself?" said Lena.

"Oh, well, my writing ..." said Danilova. "Besides, I never have any time with this work."

They ate some potatoes warmed on the stove, and drank tea in the kitchen on a table covered with oilcloth. Everything in the house was very clean and Lena thought to herself that it was only to be expected in Danilov's house. Danilova put the sugar from Lena's parcel into a crystal bowl. There was no butter.

"I haven't had any sour cream for a long time," Danilova tried to apologise, "and the rations this month haven't yet been distributed."

"Yes, life at home is hard," Lena thought to herself again.

"I am teaching Vania to work too," said Danilova. "If anything should happen, which God forbid, and we remain alone, he should be able to do any kind of work."

Lena was more and more surprised: was it possible that Danilov hadn't let his wife know that the train was no more in the front line?

"We don't go to the front line any more," she said, "we're in the rear all the time. So don't worry."

"Well, anything might happen," Danilova sighed. "It's war-time. Might get a bomb anywhere."

She became thoughtful and her tired face expressed the readiness to accept any blow of fate.

"How do they live together?" thought Lena, as she went home. "What do they talk about? How dreary it must be. Not like Danya and me."

She did all the other errands next day and went to meet the hospital train. They had told her at the Centre where to look for it.

The train was standing at the junction of "Z." The station was packed with trains, all military, all priority. It was impossible to breathe in the train. Doctor Belov walked along the platform; the dry coal dust cracked

irritatingly under his feet. ... A cock crowed under the staff train: that was where the hens were kept in special cages. A few Red Army men and children were standing on the platform. A porter stopped with his cart and peered under the train. A little girl wandered up and down shouting:

"Their tails flutter as the train moves!"

Kostritsyn stood by, with a stern and angry face. The Red Army men laughed. One of them said:

"The cock, if you please, crows even underneath the train. He is the irrepressible male."

Another one, spitting out pumpkin seed, added:

"The soldier follows the hens."

The doctor came nearer. The Red Army men went on laughing.

"You see, comrade chief, what's going on?" asked Kostritsyn.

"Well," said the doctor, "it's not so terrible, after all."

"One fine day, I'll go and put myself under the engine what with all these jokes," grumbled Kostritsyn.

"Nonsense," said the doctor, "Come to my room, we'll talk."

He walked on. Suprugov was having a sunbath on the roof of the eighth coach; he wore shorts and a round cap on his head. In the window of the kitchen train the fat bare arms of Iya were seen moving about—she was plucking a hen. One heard the rattle of a mechanical potato-peeler. Also Sobol's voice:

"Why do you allocate the same rations when Ogorodnikova is away? That's one less. Nizvetsky has colitis—that's another."

"What a full picture of life our train represents," thought Dr Belov.

He remembered his first trip. The carriage in which he stood now, burning, all the windows blasted. Now they had hens hatching under their trains. The train had become overgrown with domesticity.

"Well," said the doctor, "it's the natural run of things."

He thought of this wearily, he forced himself to think of everything that surrounded him. Since Lena's departure he was overcome by distress. The arguments with which he had reassured himself now seemed childish to him. He persuaded himself that everything would be all right, and was comforted by these illusions. Even if that parcel had reached its destination, how long would it have lasted? A month, perhaps, economising a lot. ... One of these days he would know its fate. He would hold the envelope with Sonechka's writing. He knew it by heart, every letter and every pen-twist. Why one envelope? A pack of envelopes. Ah, if only there were one, to tell him that they were still alive. ...

It was the same kind of hot day as at the beginning of July last year. At Vitebsk station in Leningrad. Then as now there were trains on all the lines. No, there were fewer trains. And then suddenly Sonechka emerged from nowhere in a grey dress.

He asked Danilov when Lena would return. He answered—in about eight days.

Eight? Let's say ten to be sure. The doctor coloured ten squares blue in his copybook. When one day elapsed he crossed out one of the squares with a red pencil.

Danilov spent the whole morning with the Sverdlovsk transport officer trying to get his train moving and at dinner-time an engine was hitched on. It was a tedious journey, stopping at every signal, but at last things began to improve.

Suddenly they found themselves racing ahead at full speed, roaring through vast stations where officials holding raised flags followed them with their eyes. A telegram had come saying that they were urgently needed to take on wounded.

It was evening, Dr Belov got out his exercise book and wanted to cross out another blue square, the seventh. Seven days since Lena had gone. ... There was a knock at the door—Kostritsyn. He walked into the

compartment—grey-headed, massive, thumbs at his trouser seams.

"Sit down," said the doctor, "Let's talk unofficially, as man to man. Sit down. Sit down."

Kostritsyn seated himself.

"Well?" said the doctor. "What's your complaint?"

Kostritsyn coughed into his hand.

"Comrade Commandant," he said, "you're not a young man, either, put yourself in my place. There's not a man on earth who wouldn't grind his teeth."

"Yes," said the doctor, "of course it's like a pantomime—those chickens, I mean. But you know, fresh eggs are good for the wounded. Very good for them."

The train slowed down, they were approaching a station. It halted, but the next moment there was a whistle, and the wheels began rumbling again. ...

"Comrade Commandant," said Kostritsyn again. "I didn't volunteer in order to keep chickens. I thought a hospital train was a military job. And now, look at me. if you please!"

"They told me," said the doctor with innocent flattery, "that you were an expert in agricultural matters, that it was your hobby."

Kostritsyn nodded.

"That's right. I've known all about it since I was a child. We all went in for it at the settlement. I used to keep a goat at home. But it's one thing there, and another thing here. I wouldn't mind pigs—they're in the luggage van. Nobody can see them. ... All on the quiet. ... None of those smiles and giggles. ... But chickens, damn them! Everybody can see them!"

"Ah, Kostritsyn," said the doctor, sighing, "all that's so trivial. ... The day'll come when we'll be eating them with white sauce. ..."

Kostritsyn was not listening.

"They have to be let out, don't they? Live-stock can't be kept in cages all the time. ... I let them out wherever it's possible. They wander off. ... scatter, three hundred yards from the train. If you ask the girls to watch them—

well they're young, with their heads full of princes and lieutenants, got no taste for looking after chickens. And after all, what's there so difficult about it? They know themselves what they've got to do—as soon as the engine whistles they come running back to the cage themselves. It's not the trouble I'm talking about, it just makes me look a fool. ... ”

“Stop a bit,” said the doctor.

He had heard nothing of Kostritsyn's last words, all his attention had been concentrated on some sort of bustle in the coach. Cries could be heard above the rattle of the wheels, running footsteps and banging doors. Kostritsyn rose, anxious to be of help.

“May I go and see?”

“Yes, find out what it is.”

Kostritsyn left the compartment, then returned, grinning from ear to ear.

“Comrade Commandant! The mail's come.”

The doctor blinked and rose. ... Danilov was standing in the half-open door, gay and smiling.

“A letter for you from Leningrad, Doctor.”

“Give it to me, give it to me,” the doctor stammered, taking the envelope with shaking hands.

The letter which Danilov received from the Central Committee of the Party was short, polite and dry. Leaving aside the polite phrases, its contents amounted to—stay where you are, comrade, and work properly there, because you'll have to answer for the job. ...

So that was that.

Flushing slightly, Danilov folded the letter neatly and put it into his breast pocket, where he kept his Party membership card.

A letter from his wife—he glanced over it swiftly. All alive and well. ... Greetings from relations and friends. ... Lena would tell him more. Ah, that was a fine girl, how quickly she'd jumped on—after all, the train had hardly stopped for a minute. ...

He decided to test the general atmosphere and find

out who had had letters. He went out into the corridor. Julia Dmitriyevna, Faïna and Suprugov were standing by the window. Faïna chattering about something, her hand on Suprugov's shoulder. Suprugov was looking melancholy.

"I've had bad news," he said with dignity as Danilov approached. "My mother's died."

Danilov did not know what to say when a man he heartily disliked told him about his troubles. Decency demanded that he should say something. After a moment's silence, he asked:

"How old was she?"

"Seventy-eight," Suprugov replied.

"Yes," said Danilov sympathetically. "A great age."

He walked on. What could he say? An old woman, not in any way remarkable, had lived to a ripe old age and then died.

He went to the Commandant to hear what news he had from home. ...

Dr Belov was sitting on the divan, the same one on which he had sat with his wife. Danilov was thunder-struck—ten minutes ago he had left the doctor flushed, gay and excited. Now there was a helpless old man sitting there, his face grey and haggard, with all the light gone out of it.

A letter was lying on the table. Danilov took it up and read it.

The doctor looked at him dully. Danilov sat down beside him and said nothing. Suddenly the doctor sighed loudly, his eyes filled with tears and his hands moved helplessly over his knees and the covering of the divan.

"You can't imagine!" he whispered. "You can't imagine. ..."

He wanted to say that Danilov couldn't imagine what an angel Sonechka had been and what an angel Lyalya had been, and all that they had meant to him, the doctor. But he had not the strength to speak. His shoulders were shaking, he covered his face with his hands and cried,

sobbing and groaning. Tears trickled between his fingers and ran on to his sleeve, he caught them with trembling lips, swallowed them and choked on them.

Still Danilov said nothing, but sat very erect, pale, a cold look of anger in his eyes. Then, seeing that the doctor was getting no calmer he went out into the corridor and called Sister Faïna, who brought bromide and a sleeping dose. Between them, they forced the doctor to take them, and stayed by him until sleep overcame him. Then they left. As she went out, Faïna burst into tears.

"I would give anything," she sobbed, "to be able to comfort him."

"And I," said Danilov, "I'd like to kill one of them with my own hands right now, one of those swine that are doing this to us."

That night the train loaded up with wounded. They did not waken Dr Belov. Danilov announced that the train Commandant was ill, and he and Suprugov signed for the patients. But in the morning he went to the Commandant and reported that No. 20—in coach six—a trifling foot wound and concussion—was impossibly capricious. He was demanding the doctor every five minutes, insisting on having a complete bath, giving his neighbours no peace, and they did not know what to do with him; it would be a good thing if the Commandant himself could come. ...

There was only one thing the doctor understood out of all that Danilov said—that he must go somewhere. He put on his overall, and began to go the rounds.

He went from compartment to compartment with uncertain steps, and looked intently into the face of every man, as though trying to find something that it was urgently necessary to discover. Sister Faïna and Sister Smirnova followed him, Smirnova handing him the case books. The doctor took them and read them with the same look of intense earnestness. Sometimes the diagnosis was not sufficient for him, then he stopped and read the whole case history.

He was afraid of misreading something, and doing the

wrong thing. He was afraid of forgetting forever how to give treatment, how to think, how to read. The world had retreated from him, lost its sounds, scents, its perceptibility. And that was quite natural—how could the world be the same if Sonechka and Lyalya were no longer in it?

But as the doctor went from coach to coach, his surroundings became more real to him. The words written in the diagnosis and spoken by those around penetrated his consciousness more quickly, and called forth the proper thoughts and reactions. His attention was concentrated as usual upon the accustomed objects, and those objects in their turn took on their former character. Voices no longer came from far, far away, they were right there beside him, and each voice had its particular cadence. Plaster-of-Paris and bandages had their characteristic unpleasant smell, the stethoscope brought its familiar sounds to his ear. Here was a man who must go to the isolation compartment, he showed signs of pneumonia of the right lung.

The world wanted to go on living, even though Sonechka and Lyalya were no longer in it. That was incomprehensible, terrible, but the doctor could do nothing about it. He himself was alive. He wanted to see the capricious patient about whom Danilov had told him.

No. 20 turned out to be a strong man of thirty with curly hair and rosy cheeks. He had thrown off his shirt and was lying on top of the rumpled sheet, bare to the waist. His torso was rosy, the shoulders rounded like a woman's. Lutokhin, Ivan Mironovich the doctor read in the case book.

"Any complaints?" asked the doctor.

Lutokhin complained of the heat.

"I'm always too hot," he said. "In the hospital they used to give me deep baths, that was the only thing that cooled me."

Then he began to groan, loudly and theatrically, throwing his head back and rolling his eyes.

"Now, now, now," said Faïna. "It can't hurt as much as that."

"I can't breathe," said Lutokhin.

The doctor read in the case book of slight wound and concussion ... no attacks for the past two weeks ... wound healing normally. In the hospital he had been given deep baths, as it had been observed that they improved his spirits.

"We have no baths," said the doctor. "A shower—certainly. Or you can have a hipbath."

"What the devil do I want with a shower!" cried Lutokhin, and swore. "I want to lie in a bath and go on lying there, devil take you all!"

And he began groaning louder than ever.

"Shut up, you phoney," came a voice from the upper berth. "Comrade doctor, why do you bother with him? He's putting it all on."

The doctor asked for Lutokhin's temperature. The thermometer showed 37.1.

"There, you see!" said Lutokhin ominously.

Examination showed a slight rise in blood pressure, weakened reactions of the pupils to light and the bad breath usual in old and hardened smokers.

"Appetite good," said Faïna. "Bowel movement normal."

"I assure you that there's nothing badly wrong," the doctor told Lutokhin. "You'll just have to be patient for the few days on the journey. In the hospital you'll be able to get baths again, and then you'll stand the heat better."

Lutokhin jumped and cursed savagely.

"Quiet, quiet," said the doctor. "There are women here."

He began to move away.

"Where are you going!" shouted Lutokhin. "Order me a shower!"

"Shower," said the doctor, and Smirnova wrote: "Shower for No. 20."

"There's nothing to be done with him," said Faïna.

The shower was ready in twenty minutes, but when Smirnova came for Lutokhin, he seemed to be asleep.

"Dozed off," said a neighbour. "As soon as you'd gone, he shut up and dozed. You shouldn't dance around him so much, he'd be all the better."

Lutokhin's face was buried in his pillow; all that was visible was the edge of a rosy cheek and an earlobe, like a cherry.

"Let him sleep," said Smirnova, and went away.

That was at about eleven in the morning. Just before dinner an amazed Faïna ran to Dr Belov and reported that Lutokhin was dead.

He had died of a brain hæmorrhage.

This was the first death in the train, unless one counted the Pskov woman wounded in the abdomen who had died on the operating table. But she had been dying when they had laid her there.

Lutokhin's death left a sense of depression. Everybody had a feeling of guilt although nobody was to blame. It had been one of those cases which science is unable to predict or prevent. Concussion sometimes does have these unexpected effects; death is cunning, it camouflages itself, conceals itself within the body of the patient and then, suddenly seizing him by the throat, snarls in triumph.

"In all probability," Dr Belov thought painfully, "he should never have been moved from the hospital. It may be that the vibration of the train led to the disturbance of the brain that brought instant death. But who could foresee it? There had been no attacks for two weeks, and he gave the impression of a healthy man. But maybe it's my fault," thought the doctor, trying to remember all the details of his examination of Lutokhin. "I allowed myself to be deceived by superficial favourable signs, missed some very important unfavourable detail, and did not take measures. ... Yes, I did not attach sufficient importance to the bad reaction of his pupils to the light. I noticed it, I remember it very well, but I did not take any steps." The doctor knew that he could not have

taken any radical steps, that it was an unusual case, a complicated one, deceptive, that only some medical genius could have predicted it—from some sort of inspiration, instinct ... But nevertheless, the doctor's conscience tortured him.

"He probably has a wife and children," he thought. "A wife ... children ... And now they're orphans, because an old, useless doctor did not pay attention to the reaction of the pupils. If I am in trouble," thought the doctor, "why should others suffer on that account? Why should Lutokhin's wife and children suffer because of my grief? That's monstrous. If there was any punishment laid down for it, I ought to go and confess: sentence me, I let a man's life go because of my own personal grief; because of my grief the soldier Lutokhin, Ivan Moronovich, has died ... They would say that it's not my fault, that it was simply an unfortunate accident. If I could only believe that it really isn't my fault, how good that would be, how relieved I'd feel!"

And on the table, under the glass top lay the letter from an old friend and partner in his games of Preference, telling him that Sonechka and Lyalya had been killed by a bomb in one of the first raids on Leningrad in September, 1941.

CHAPTER VIII

REMINISCENCES

IN the autumn of 1942, the German army reached Stalingrad, and there began that great battle which for five months was followed with suspense throughout the world.

At first it was a suspense of fear—that the Germans would break through to the Volga. Then came the dawn of hope that perhaps they wouldn't. And after that—the sure confidence that this was the boundary that the Germans would never cross, the starting point from which the Red Army would begin driving the enemy westward, liberating Soviet territory from the invader.

Now, when the train was running empty, Danilov would gather the people twice a day—morning and evening—to discuss the latest communiqué, and the centre of discussion was invariably Stalingrad. In all the coaches where he could find room for it Danilov put up a board for newspaper cuttings. Stalingrad was in all minds and hearts, it was a synonym for hope, for the approach of the glorious end, the dawn of a new day.

All the men who were fit for active service had left the train. They were called up. But Danilov was not summoned, and remembering the result of his application to the Central Party Committee, he kept quiet.

The girls began volunteering for army service, and many of them started learning how to use rifles and machine guns.

Danilov was not in the least surprised when Lena Ogorodnikova volunteered, but when he came across the signature of fat Iya among the packet of applications, he whistled in amazement—after all, a year ago he had found her crouching in a shell-hole, half dead with terror. ...

He preferred listening to talking himself. People were accustomed to the commissar coming in, sitting down silently, listening to the talk for a minute or two while he awkwardly rolled a cigarette (he had only recently begun to smoke) and then rising and going out.

"He's sick of everything," said Sukhoyedov. "Sick of us and sick of our talk. Look at him, he's still a young man, he wants a bit of scope."

"And who isn't sick of it?" somebody asked.

But they were wrong; he found them more interesting than ever.

Julia Dmitriyevna was talking to Suprugov, as she unravelled some knitted garment and rolled the wool into a ball.

"Well, anyway," she said, "we've stopped them. Remember Pskov? Our resistance was a very different matter then. Remember? There were our units retreating right before our eyes. ... Yes, you were the first to point it out to me. ... But this time they'll get no further. We're going to win this battle. I can just imagine what must be going on there—street by street and house by house. ..."
There was a note of exasperation in her voice: *she* should have been in Stalingrad.

Kravtsov's comments were the most interesting of all.

"There's David," he said to Nadya. "He began as a shepherd, and when he was a slip of a lad he killed the giant Goliath with a stone out of a catapult."

"A cata—what?"

"Well—a sling, the sort boys sling stones with. And for that the Jews made him their tsar."

"Their tsa-ar? Did the Jews have tsars, then?"

"Good lord, what a fool you are!" sighed Kravtsov. "All you know is twice two's four ..."

A moment's silence. Then Kravtsov's voice took up the tale:

"They had some famous tsars. They were tsars and prophets and writers and judges all rolled into one. Thousands of years ago David wrote words that lift your heart up to-day. He wrote: 'Truth shall be thy

weapon.' Can you understand that much? It wasn't a howitzer that was to be your weapon, but truth. Yet he himself killed Goliath with a sling, thus accepting the howitzer, but at the same time saying: 'Truth shall be thy weapon.' Put it another way—without truth howitzers won't get you anywhere. And another time he said: 'Peace be thy realm.' It's not in war we can find happiness, but in peace. But war is the road to peace. ... Oh, what's the good of talking to you!"

"At our school," said Nadya, "one of the lads almost put another boy's eye out with a sling. ..."

At the beginning of winter, the hospital train had to stop for twenty-four hours near Moscow, in the labyrinth of the circular network. They were travelling empty.

Danilov allowed the unit to go to the cinema and went himself. The cinema was in a small transport workers' club, decorated with huge red cloths with inscriptions half washed off by the autumn rains. The audience consisted mostly of noisy small boys who were for ever shouting out for something. A terrific whistling, stamping and cat-calling broke out every now and then. "The screen, what about the screen. Put it straight!" The war news came first, then a feature from the front-lines. The hero was a young lad, pretty as a picture and his girl was every bit as good. Together they performed deeds of daring. Then the Germans got their claws on her and she died, tortured by fascist hangmen. Everybody knew that the Germans on the screen were not real Germans, but the whole thing was so familiar, so topical—the heroism and the hatred for Germans, and the girl sacrificing her life for her country—that the whole audience was moved as it watched the picture. The cries of the boys, "You lout, look after the screen!" reached their peak towards the end.

As they left the cinema, snow was falling. It fell in large, slow flakes on the road. The nurses, with tear-stained faces, walked in groups talking excitedly. Julia Dmitriyevna and Faïna passed Danilov. Sobol caught

up with them, shouted: "Ah, knight, Faïna was her name," and slipped his arm into the Sister's.

Danilov let them all pass and walked on slowly, his hands pushed into the pockets of his overcoat, his face upturned.

Whether one went to a film, whether one read a book,—always it had to be love, love. ... Was it like that in real life as well, was love so necessary for every man? What about himself—he had lived without love—and who was to say that his had not been a good life? Each day was well filled—without all that nonsense about love. ... He had loved once—it had gone wrong, he had overcome it and gone without it.

He had been a mere lad, just like the one on the screen, only not so pretty and with his feet not so firmly on the ground. A fine thing—youth. Good to look back upon. A little embarrassing, a little wistful ... but pleasing all the same. Well, and what then? He, the mature man, was not responsible for the lad of twenty-five years ago. He had three false teeth and his hair was grey at the temples. It was six or seven years since he had taken the photograph out of his pocket.

The lad had been clumsy. He'd had bad luck. But Danilov was grateful to him for these clumsy, bitter-sweet memories.

When Danilov was fifteen years old, a Youth League group was formed in the village where he had been born and lived until then.

A thin young fellow in huge boots arrived from town in the post cart, gathered all the lads and girls in the school building, talked long and enthusiastically, and then began signing up those who wished to join.

Danilov signed up, not so much because he realized what it all meant as in defiance to the mothers who had gathered outside the windows and at the door and kept calling: "Mishka! Tanka! I've told you already to come on home!" Some of them whispered, some called out loudly, and Danilov was proud that his own mother was not among them. On arriving home, he announced:

"Well, I'm in the Youth League!"

"And you went as you were," was his mother's only comment. "Wouldn't have hurt you to put on a new shirt. What must that fellow from town think of you?"

Neither she nor his father ever again interfered in his affairs, except once. They were quite sure that their own steady, honest, hard-working life had given their son an example, and that he would never dishonour either himself or them whatever path in life he might choose.

At home, a courteous, considerate attitude to everybody, quiet, sparing talk and hard work was the rule. Danilov could not remember that his parents had ever drunk, quarrelled or been idle. His father had a small smithy; he was a pious man, but even on Easter Sunday he would put on his work clothes and go to the smithy if anybody brought him a horse to shoe.

"God doesn't disapprove of work," he would say.

He was carpenter and saddler, he could make fishing nets and was the best reaper in the district. In the old days he had hired himself out to the gentry at reaping time, and in his old age, he would still put on a clean shirt for haymaking, shave, sharpen his scythe and go to reap for the state farm. He was an artist at the job, and liked to see his work admired.

Danilov had spent more than half of his life far from his parents and saw the old man very seldom, but he always retained his love of work and liked to do it so that responsible people would say: "Good chap!" A valuable heritage. ...

His mother had taught him to cook, mend socks and wash clothes.

"It'll be useful on military service!" she said.

While he was little his mother sometimes caressed him, but as he grew older she stopped doing it. He never remembered her kisses, never had any special funeral ceremony when she died, but he always honoured her memory.

The Revolution came with its new words and concepts. He joined the Youth League, but there was little

change in his life—the village was ninety kilometres from the railway.

Books came to the Youth League by post. The children read them but could not understand them. There was no-one to explain. The thin young fellow with high boots sometimes came, he had grown whiskers by now. He made a report, things became a little clearer after that. But not much. On Sundays the Komsomols—there were four of them—put on clean shirts and went to church. They did not go to pray, but because it was the best place to meet people. One day Danilov was bridesman at a wedding and held the crown over the groom's head. The groom was also a Komsomol, but was married in church because the girl would not have it otherwise.

His life changed only when the old village schoolmistress retired on a pension and a new one arrived.

The new schoolmistress was called Faïna, she was quite young—barely twenty, and pretty, with thick braids which she wound round her head in a coronet.

"What the devil are you up to here?" she told the boys. "I'd have taken your Youth League tickets away long ago."

She demanded a new cottage near the school, and when the village Soviet would not hear of it she went to the district authorities who sent an order for the cottage to be provided and a club organized there. On returning she brought with her two packing-cases full of books and began reading them aloud in the school in the evenings.

At first only her pupils came to the reading, but later on, adults began dropping in, even elderly people. They liked the way the schoolmistress read—they had never heard anything like it before. She would begin reading quietly, bending to catch the light of the paraffin lamp, her shoulders hunched under the shawl thrown over them. She would read calmly, even indifferently, but then the sense of what she was reading would carry her out of herself, her face would light up, and the young eyes would glow under the lowered lashes. Absorbed, excited, she would read now loudly, now almost in a

whisper; she would throw off her shawl and kneel on the chair, her glowing cheeks supported on both hands. Sometimes, when the listeners sighed in sympathy for the sorrows of another's life, tears would glisten on her own eyelashes, roll down her cheeks and fall upon the open book. ...

For the first time Danilov saw how rich, lovely and magnetic a human being can be. He could not tear his eyes from this wonderful person. He wanted to be like her. He realized fully that much was needed for this—look at the way she read, never stumbling over a single word, using different kinds of voices for different people. Everything funny became still funnier as she read it, and the sad bits were so sad that you wanted to cry. ... Well, and what of it? She was older than he, she had learned a lot, learned things that he had not had time to learn yet. But who was she, after all? A simple, ordinary person, just like himself. Her felt boots were patched, and her shawl was just like the one his mother wore. She had studied, and look what she was like now, he thought. He would study too, and be as she was.

"And she herself was stately as a peacock," she read in a musical sing-song. ... "And when she spoke, it was like the music of a stream. ... The moon gleamed beneath her braids, and on her brow a star burned."

"And you're the queen of swans," he thought in rapture. "You're the stream, you're my star. ..."

Faina distributed books among the Youth League members, and told them they should be "book-hawkers," and Danilov went about among the cottages persuading the people to read. Then Faina announced that an amateur dramatics group was to be organized, and began rehearsing some play of ancient times, with princes and barons. There were fewer lads than girls in the group, and the girls did not want to play men's roles. So Faina herself took the part of an old prince, a tyrant and murderer, a feudal lord, so as to set an example. She found some tow and made herself a long beard like the ones in pictures of Jehovah, but at the last minute she

hated to disfigure her face with it and drew a little beard and moustaches with burnt cork. The result was that the old prince looked much younger than his own daughter, a weepy widow who wanted to go into a monastery, and much sweeter and more feminine than all the young counts and princes. He was the one whom the audience liked best of all—and they showed it by applause and stamping—despite all his wicked deeds. ...

The show was a great success. The group began to grow. The parents seeing that their children behaved well with the young teacher, that she did not spoil them, and read books to them, began to send their children to her of their own accord. They even gathered at her house in the evenings, after the day's work. Danilov alone kept worrying from early morning: what excuse to find for dropping in at the school? Once or twice he came during school hours, but Faïna very sternly forbade this. He could not bear to live one hour without seeing her. He grew lazy at his work: the work could wait, what he wanted was to go at once and see what she was doing, hear what she was saying. When she went to town, he wilted with boredom, counting the hours until she returned. When he saw her—warmth and light seemed to spread around, everything acquired a new meaning, charm, power. Songs had a different sound, words became more important. "Vanya's in love with the teacher," the boys teased. He did not believe them. What did they know? He respected her and wanted to be like her. In love? Why she was unapproachable! Had anyone said that she was just a Youth League teacher like so many others, he would have given them a licking. ...

Danilov was eighteen, a tall, broad-shouldered fellow with strong arms, a head taller than Faïna, with a fresh, fair complexion and a faint down on his upper lip.

For some time his strength had been becoming a burden to him, his own body was a load. At times he would fall into fits of brooding, at others, he would be wildly gay. Suddenly his mother began talking about

marriage, said that her strength was failing, she probably had not so very much longer to live (she was troubled with a gynæcological disease, the reason why she had no more children after Ivan) and would like to have a good daughter-in-law to whom she could hand over the home with an easy mind. Of course, it was early for him to marry yet, he could easily wait a couple of years, but it would do no harm to have his eye on a suitable girl now. ... He suddenly interrupted her with unexpected boldness, smiling angrily.

"Who are you hinting at?"

He knew well enough who it was—Dusya Kasatkina, the miller's daughter. Everybody was teasing him about Dusya, saying she was dying of love for him. What had she wanted to pick on him for? Why should he marry her, either in two years or ten?

His mother was offended, both because he had interrupted her so rudely, and because of the word "hint."

"I'm not in the habit of hinting, thank God," she said. "But I'd have you know that she's refused two suitors because of you. She's a good girl, and a good worker."

He picked up his cap and went out of the cottage.

"Where are you going? To the schoolmistress?" burst from her, and then, as the door banged behind him, bitterly: "There's sorrow afoot. ..."

And it was to the school that his feet took him. The village was wrapped in the winter dusk. For some reason the school-room window was dark, whereas usually the lamp would be burning in the large classroom. ... Had she gone away, maybe? His heart seemed to turn over. ...

Young folks from the Youth League met him as he approached, and told him that tonight there would be neither rehearsal nor reading, the schoolmistress was ill in bed. He listened, and then went on. To *her*. They called something after him, but he did not listen. His lips were trembling.

He entered the porch, which was trampled with snow, walked along the dark corridor, past the empty,

dim classrooms, and opened the familiar door without knocking.

Faina was lying on the bed, fully dressed, face to the wall.

"Who's there?" she asked in a startled voice.

"It's me," he answered.

"Vanya Danilov? What's the matter? There's no rehearsal."

"I know. I just came to see you."

Why had he come? Wasn't it because he wanted to say: "I don't wish to marry. I don't want anybody but you. I want to be with you always!" And now he had come and was standing at the door like a post, feeling that if she told him to go the bitter tears would overflow. ...

It may be that she understood.

"You startled me, coming in like that," she said. "I was dozing. I had some dream or other ..." and she stretched luxuriously, with a little sound of enjoyment. "Light the lamp. It's on the table. The matches are on the shelf. And take your cap off, won't you ever learn ... Those village ways!"

He took off his cap and lighted the lamp, feeling awkward, insignificant and in no way interesting to her, but never thinking of going.

Faina sat up on the bed and began pinning up the disordered hair at the back of her head. She wound her plaits round her arm like snakes, holding her comb in her teeth. Her arms were bare to the elbow—firm, round, working with swift, sure movements. She was wearing absurd stockings, striped red and blue, with a small rosy toe peeping out from a hole.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked, her voice dim with sleep. "What have you come for—to look at me? Sit down, you're in my light." He sat down. She put her feet in the worn-out felt boots, came closer to the table and also sat down, wrapping herself up in her shawl.

"I am not ill at all," she said pensively, "But you see, Vanya, I got a letter to-day saying that my granny had

died. And do you know that although I have seen Granny only about three times and wasn't a bit attached to her, I was upset for some reason—I don't know why. I've got no close relations any more now—only distant cousins ... I won't have anything to do with *them*. They're shopkeepers! You know, Vanya, you needn't have a shop to be a shopkeeper. They hate us communists. Granny also hated us. Why then should I, idiot that I am, cry because she's dead?" She laughed and dried her tears with the edge of the handkerchief.

"My daddy was a fine man, *he* was a teacher, he was killed by White Guards in the civil war. I've been alone for three years now."

Tears poured abundantly down her cheeks, she got up. "I'm letting myself go. Let's have some tea. I'll give you a book to look at, it's better than looking at me." She put a fat book in front of him and went out.

And so he sat and dared not move, contenting himself with the pleasure of looking at her room.

He had been there before, but always with the other young people, and not for long at a time, and it had always happened that he stood at the back and could not see anything. Now he was here alone, and everything was in full view.

It was a small room with log walls, a narrow bed covered with a thin flannel blanket, a bookshelf over the table and washing things in the corner. All these objects were poor and impersonal, but for Danilov they had a precious and important life of their own—within those walls *she* breathed, here *she* slept, here washed herself, at that table *she* sat and corrected exercise books, she had turned the pages of those books, read them. ... The dearest and most interesting were the few things which were evidently her own personal belongings and gave him a glimpse into her inner world—there on the wall, that photograph of an elderly man in a Russian shirt and jacket in a polished frame with bronze corners—that must be her father, although he was not like her. And there was a thimble, her thimble. And what could

she have in that box with the gilt roses? Thread? Needles? Ribbons? There was her grey shawl thrown over the back of a chair, and there, on the hanger, the pink blouse that she wore on holidays. ... Dear objects, as tender and significant as she herself. ...

He heard her steps and opened the book hurriedly. It was an illustrated paper of 1913. There was a picture of an iceberg floating at sea and a small ship. "The loss of the *Titanic*" read Danilov. Faïna came in with a tea pot.

"So you've got there already? Do you know how the *Titanic* perished?" She told him about it, gave him tea, cried again about Granny. ...

He sat there as though bewitched, looking with all his eyes, listening with all his ears to her talk, and left only when she told him straight out that it was time to go.

It was already night. When he emerged into the street there was not a light to be seen, and the only sound breaking the deep silence was the dripping of water somewhere. He looked round: there was still light in her window.

What did she do when she was alone? He went to the window and peeped cautiously in. She was sitting at the table, her cheeks supported on her hands, lost in thought. What was she thinking about? ... She rose, reached out to the window, the white curtain fell to, the light faded—Faïna had put out the lamp. ...

Danilov went home. He would have liked to walk for a long, long time through the empty streets, thinking about her.

After that he began coming every evening.

She did not stand on ceremony with him, she would push some book into his hands, while she busied herself with her own affairs, correcting exercise books, reading, darning stockings, or sometimes going away somewhere, while he sat there like a sentry.

If anybody had asked him just why he sat there, he would have said:

"Because I enjoy it."

If anybody had asked him if he wanted to kiss her, he would have been horrified. He had never even taken her hand.

Once when he came she was not at home, and the old woman who looked after the school building told him that she had gone to the steam bath and would be back soon. He went into her room, lighted the lamp, opened a copy of the *Niva*,* and waited.

She came rosy and gay, smelling warm and clean, a towel wrapped round her head like a turban.

"Oh, you're here already!" she said. She raised her arms, unwound the towel, flung her head back and shook it, the heavy wet strands of hair falling over her shoulders and back.

"Comb it, Vanya," she said, holding out a comb to him.

Obediently he began combing the cool, slippery, heavy locks; he took them up, and his hand sensed the heavy wetness of them. His fingers tangled in the soft, silky strands, and for some reason that he could not understand he found they were trembling.

He was standing behind her, as she faced the mirror. He could see her face in it, filled with gaiety and mischief. ... He dropped the comb, put his arms round Faïna's shoulders, bent her head back, and kissed her full on the lips. And she responded to his kiss—responded! But in the same instant she broke loose from him, laughing angrily.

"Now, now, boy!"

He never remembered how he found himself out in the street again. He had forgotten his cap, he went without it, lost and confused. Boy! Of course, he was a boy, a fool of a boy, an impudent boy, how had he ever dared! ... Yes, but why had she laughed at him? Why had she told him to comb her hair? She'd done it on purpose. Why had she responded to his kiss? He had felt it, he could still feel it, how tenderly, how tenderly her lips had moved beneath his. ... She had responded

* An illustrated magazine.

to his kiss on purpose, so as to laugh at him afterwards! No, no. Her eyes had sparkled, she had kissed him, kissed him!

"What's the matter with you, are you drunk?" his mother asked quietly and sadly.

He said nothing but hurried to the room where his bed was. He did not undress, but sat down, his arms embracing his knees, his burning forehead resting on them. That was how he finally fell asleep just before dawn, but even in his dreams her grey eyes glowed before him and her soft lips stirred gently beneath his.

In the morning one of the schoolboys brought him his cap. He trembled as though it had been a letter from Faïna instead of just a cap.

He would go to her! ... But shame stopped him. ... How would he go in? What would he say? She would laugh, and what would he do ... stand there silent? Look at pictures? He was tired of saying nothing and looking at pictures, he wanted to kiss her, he wanted to be with her always, beside her, in her room!

In the evening he would see her in the club and would tell her that ... if his courage did not fail him.

That evening was appointed for the opening of the club. Danilov was late because, do what he might, he could not find the words for what he wanted to tell her. ... He did not even go there to nail up the curtains and hang the posters ... all the other Youth League members were there, but he did not go because he was afraid to meet her.

When he entered the room, the formal meeting was in progress. Faïna was sitting on the presidium beside the chairman of the village Soviet, with a stranger in town clothes on her other hand—a man who had come from the regional executive committee for the opening ceremony. There were speeches, applause.

Danilov clapped with the rest, but he understood nothing, he only saw Faïna's free, proud bearing, saw her whispering with the man from town, saw how lovely she was—and nothing more. He tried to catch her eye,

but she never even so much as glanced at him. After the meeting there was dancing, benches were pushed to the walls, the accordion player expanded and contracted his instrument, and the couples circled the room. ... Danilov had finally made up his mind to approach Faïna when he saw that she was dancing with the man from town.

Danilov did not know how to waltz. He stood there leaning against the wall, watching the pink blouse whirling round the room. ... He was agitated, oppressed, tormented. ...

Could it be that she had cut him off—completely and for ever? Was it possible that there was no way of making things right again? ... Now she was leaving the room, arm in arm with the man from town. Should he follow her? But pride, shame whispered—don't go. He hesitated for a few minutes, and when he finally ran out to look for her she was no longer in the club.

She had gone away with that fellow in the jacket—right in front of everybody—where had they gone? A paroxysm of rage swept over him, everything seemed to go black before his eyes. He clenched his fists. ... Where should he seek them? He dashed outside—not a soul there, nothing but stars and frost; the whole village was at the club. He dashed towards the school, saw it before him—and stopped dead. There was a light in her window—she had gone home, then. For a second his rage abated at the sight of the lighted window that had always held such peace and happiness for him. She had felt tired and had gone home. "My heart's delight was tired, and she's going to bed. ..." He went up to the window.

Faïna was standing with her back to the wall, leaning lightly against it. Her head was thrown back, her face seemed that of a stranger, the lips parted as though in fear. ... The fellow from town was sitting on the bed, smoking and talking. Then he rose, went to the window, his hand came out, the white curtain fell to and the light went out as the lamp wick was turned down.

The light went out.

Danilov was crying. Hot tears coursed down his cheeks, but he felt nothing of them. A thick white icicle hung near him. He seized it, snapped it off, and running a little distance away, hurled it through the window. ... There was the crack of breaking glass and a cry—Faïna's voice. Danilov took to his heels.

As he ran he wept. All was over. Farewell love, farewell Faïna, farewell dreams.

The man from town didn't wait for explanations—he was no fool. But the next day it was common talk in the village that when the schoolmistress was coming home from the club she had fallen and cut her face—not badly, but there would probably be a scar on her cheekbone. The women were all sympathy—what a pity if it spoiled her looks! She was very popular.

"Why don't you go away somewhere, Vanya, for pity's sake," Danilov's mother suggested. He said nothing. There was nowhere for him to go. He went to work felling trees and spent more than a month in the forest. He worked with fury, trying to exhaust himself and drug his suffering. If he could only tire himself enough, he would fall asleep anywhere, wherever he might be. "You're a glutton for work, Ivan!" the woodcutters marvelled. But then a message came to him from the League group ... the League district committee had asked them to send someone to the Party school, and they had decided on Danilov. He well knew who had had a finger in that.

He went to see her before leaving—he had firmly made up his mind that this was the end, but there was no reason why he should not go to say goodbye. It was late in the evening when he came to her room, she was sitting at the table correcting exercise books. She must have recognized his step as he came along the passage, but she did not jump up, her gaze was level, and the strong hand with a pen between the fingers lay easily on the open books. ... She looked him straight in the

face, calmly and coldly. He came closer so as to see her better, and saw a small, pink, star-shaped scar on her cheekbone—his mark, she would never forget him. ... She asked him nothing, and he said no word, but after standing a moment, turned and went out.

The next day he left the village.

He had all the natural shrewdness of a peasant lad who has grown up in a decent family. He was young and in love, his heart was open to passion. He was troubled by dreams, by the sun's warmth, by women's voices. But his clean-minded common sense saved him from cheap attractions.

"I shall marry, of course," he thought at times. "But I've got to wait a bit, study and grow up, make something of myself. And suppose *she* should change her mind—send for me? ..." His heart burned with the crazy idea; the thought of Faïna seemed to give it wings.

But the idea became more and more hopeless, came less and less often, and at last ceased to come at all.

He had forced it from him.

At first he had been a fool—oh, what a fool he had been! He had suffered, been torn by regrets, waited. ... He asked his mother to write about the schoolmistress. Was she still organizing and leading groups? Was she married? And his mother told him—right up to the day of her death, blaming but pitying her son, she wrote all that she knew of the schoolmistress: she was alive and well, teaching the children, running groups, not married—whom was there in the village for her to marry? Then she wrote that the schoolmistress had been elected to the regional executive committee, she was going away to the town; everybody was sorry, they were collecting money to make her a present. ... He was beside himself, even went twice to the executive committee to try and find out where she was, but at the last minute awkwardness and shame turned him back.

Then his mother wrote that the schoolmistress had been on a visit, given a lecture, and afterwards had come

to their home and told them that she was married, asked where Vanya was and sent greetings. ...

It was then that he *commanded* himself to forget her. It was still difficult, but possible—little by little he put her from him, became accustomed to the thought that she was not for him; gradually the memory of her, of the perfume of her hair, became fainter, and all that had been became like some dream from the far past. But the main thing now was that he was graduating from the Party school and would be going to serve his time in the army; he thought continually of the life before him and prepared for it in every way, he felt it as something very important and responsible. ...

Nevertheless—suddenly, without any warning, he would see her before him, radiant, clear and vivid as ever—the lines of her throat, her laughing mouth, the wet strands of hair clinging to her temples and shoulders —“Comb it, Vanya. ...” But time passed, he grew, became a man, a worker, and the vision came more and more seldom. ... And thank God for that!

He served two years in the Red Army, and during that time he read a great deal, especially books on political subjects, and joined the Communist Party. When he was demobilized and returned home, he was elected to the district executive committee and made vice-chairman. After that he had to undertake all kinds of work—in the Party, in local administration, in agriculture and industry.

There was no trace of Faïna, she had gone away to some eastern district with her husband, and now another woman was beside Danilov—his wife.

He had married the miller's daughter, Dusya, after all—not just to please his mother, it had come about of itself soon after he was demobilized and began working in the district administration. Even while he was still in the army he had felt that he ought to marry. Now he occupied a prominent position, he wanted to live in such a way that he would be respected, that no kind of

foolishness could distract him from his work, the pivot of his life.

Once when he came to visit his father he met Dusya. She was standing by the well turning the creaking handle as she drew up the bucket, and flushed as she saw Danilov coming. He greeted her, asked how she was. She was now twenty-five, the same age as Danilov, not particularly pretty, though fresh and healthy; but the main thing was that her blue eyes fastened on his face held such a shy gladness that he was touched. "She'd make a good wife," he thought.

In the evening he visited the miller, and a week later he was in the village again, gathered up Dusya and her box with all the carefully folded frocks and blouses—collected over long years for her trousseau—took her to the district town and directly to the registry office. From there she went straight to his rooms and began house-keeping—cooking dinner, washing the windows and shaking out her clothes in the yard to rid them of the smell of moth-balls, while he went to the district executive committee, where there was urgent business waiting for him.

That was how they lived—he worked, went to meetings, and travelled, while she kept house. Their relations held nothing of the sweet force that had drawn him to Faïna, his heart never beat faster, never once did he hurry home to see Dusya sooner. When friends came to visit him, he sat at table, the master of the house, talked to the guests and pressed food upon them, while Dusya handed things round. He liked to have everything clean and shining, he liked to find a hot dinner waiting for him, whatever time he might get home. Dusya tried to have everything as he wanted it, and to spread out his small earnings so that they should cover everything—good food, good clothes, something to offer guests. ...

Sometimes his conscience pricked him when he saw how hard she had to work, and those pricks made him angry with her—as the cause of it.

"Why must you break your back over that washing, as if you were a charwoman?" he would say. "Send it to the laundry."

"But they always spoil things," she would reply, thinking within herself: "Yes, the laundry. It would take sixty roubles to have all this done and then the money wouldn't last out till pay day, and where'd we be then?"

At first he used sometimes to say:

"You'll have to study. You don't know anything. Whatever happens, you must study." But within him he would be thinking: "And when can she find time for study? Busy with housework from morning till night." And she thought the same.

At the same time he was angry when the food was burnt or spoilt, or if there was dust behind the cupboard or a button off the clean shirt she gave him. All her life was absorbed in watching: whether there was dust, or missing buttons. And that she should be neat—he demanded that. He could not bear her to go out in the street badly dressed, her hair untidy. He stopped talking about study, having decided that it was her nature to like nothing but housework.

Nevertheless, he was sure that she ought to be very happy. After all, he thought, if a woman has the husband she wanted, how can she fail to be happy? He saw how glad his rare caresses made her, and that confirmed him in the feeling that she was a very happy woman.

On big holidays—the anniversary of the October Revolution and May Day—everybody went to parties at the places where they worked. Danilov always took Dusya with him, she would put on her best dress, have her hair waved, and spray herself with eau-de-cologne. Then he would take her in, find her a seat and go away to talk to more interesting people. He never once asked himself whether she might be bored at these parties. Everybody brought their wives, and he had brought his. She was no worse dressed than others, everybody spoke to her as the wife of a prominent person. So everything was all right.

But his son—that was another matter. His son—that was he himself, Danilov, his seed, his spirit, his eternally burning masculine force. He gave the boy his own name, Ivan. A grand woman, his wife, to bear him a son.

She had borne him may be, but the boy belonged to him, Danilov, wholly and entirely, even to the amusingly shaggy, reddish eyelashes which the child had one day scorched in the fire. After all, what was a mother's concern? Washing him and feeding him. But he, the father, was creating a new life, a fine, spacious life for his son. To make a smooth, bright path for their sons' lives, they, the fathers, were ready to build it with their own bodies.

During the night a blizzard rose, and wet snow beat against the compartment windows.

The train was circling about Moscow; sometimes it would race ahead at full speed, with lamps and some kind of blue lights flashing past the windows, while whistles sounded; then it would halt and stand in the darkness, who could say where, whistling dismally through the storm. They always had to wander about like that, until some Moscow station could take them.

Circling, circling, they were all circling, thought Dr Belov. He would complete his circle honestly. The main thing—to go through with it honestly. Wasn't that so, Sonechka?

Those whistles seemed to go right through his heart.

A large snowflake clung to the black glass of the window. When he was small, he had had a book with pictures of snowflakes of all shapes, on a black background. That one on the glass was as lovely as those.

He vividly remembered that book and the picture, and the ink blot on the border of the page. His sister had added arms and legs to the blot, and their mother had scolded her—what nonsense is that? His sister was grown up, a student at the Bestuzhev Courses.

His sister was dead. His mother had died still earlier.

Everybody was dead.

Dr Belov drew the thick curtain and lighted the lamp. A glass of cold tea stood on the table. There was always food standing on the table; he had asked them not to put it there, but they still kept on doing it.

To-day they had left him in peace, gone off somewhere, and the whole evening he had been alone. In the ordinary way, there would always be somebody hanging about in the compartment—probably Ivan Egorych purposely sent people to him on all sorts of errands.

A dear fellow, Ivan Egorych; but did he really think that talking about work would make the doctor forget Sonechka and Lyalya?

Alexander Ivanych had written that the house no longer existed, only rubble and stones. It was not only they who had met disaster, but their things, their clothes, the table where Sonechka had worked, Lyalya's school exercise books which he had cherished, the letters, the diary—all were gone.

Only memories left.

They could not be written down. Once upon a time a girl had existed, she had gone to school, she had done well there. Her exercise books were filled with even, clear, beautiful writing, and the teachers' marks: "Excellent," in red pencil. The girl had grown up, her father had collected her exercise books and put them away, so that she could remember her schooldays when she was old. The Germans had dropped a bomb on the house, the house fell, and there was no girl, no books.

There was nothing.

How can one write about that?

The table was small, and covered with white oilcloth. Upon it stood chemists' scales, a large glass jar with plaster-of-Paris and a white porcelain cup in which Sonechka mixed the plaster. For almost thirty years that table had stood there, with the scales, the jar and the cup. While she was working, Sonechka wore a blue overall, old, no two buttons on it alike, one button was even taken from a pair of trousers. How can one write about

that? It makes no sense, just confusion—what have trouser buttons to do with it all?

He must be going mad. Sonechka had been his friend, his truest and dearest. For thirty years they had been together, and never a single quarrel. ... How she had looked after them when he or either of the children was ill—she would sit up with them all night. ...

But his memory obstinately seized on the small things, as though trying to collect them all together, letting nothing slip.

Sometimes he recalled how he and Sonechka had gone home after their wedding—in a simple drozhky, because they could not afford a carriage. Sonechka had been wearing a white dress with a high lace collar, and a medallion hanging from her neck on a thin gold chain. She had taken off her veil in church, after the wedding. "It looks silly in the street," she said, "everybody would stare." The initials of her maiden name had been engraved on the medallion—S.K. He said that now it ought to be S.B., but she replied: "I won't change it—that belonged to my mother."

Sometimes he recalled their life in 1919. He was sent to the country where a typhus epidemic was raging, spent four months there and then caught the sickness himself. When he recovered, he was sent home to recuperate. He brought Sonechka flour and butter—everybody said he ought to do so—and felt proud of being so practical. Things were very hard at home. They had a small iron stove which they heated with old magazines, there was no electricity, the drain from the kitchen sink was blocked up so that all the dirty water and rubbish had to be carried down from the fourth floor to the yard. Sonechka carried it down herself, she would not let him help her. One day this made him angry—was he a child or an invalid? See how stout he'd become after his typhus, he was strong as a bull! And he picked up the bucket and walked off with it. It was dark on the stairs, and somebody coming before him must have spilled some slops which had frozen; his foot slipped, he fell and

the pail rolled noisily down the stairs, spilling everything. He began looking for it, but in the darkness and confusion could not find it. The door opened, and Sonechka appeared above him with a candle in her hand. She came down unhurriedly, said only: "Yes, of course," found the bucket and began wiping down the stairs with a cloth. His job was to hold the candle. ...

My darling, I was never able to do anything for you. ...

She had not much time for housekeeping, because she always worked, and that sometimes led to curious incidents. One day she set some dough to rise and forgot about it, busy with somebody's teeth. The dough rose, pushed up the lid of the pan, and overflowed on to the table and the floor. It was Lyalya's birthday, and her friends had been invited to tea. "Oh, never mind about it!" said Sonechka, bought some prepared dough in a shop, and the cakes were ready on time.

He had never been able to give her good clothes. She took all the money he received and spent it on the housekeeping, on the children, on him, and went about in old things. It troubled him sorely—he had always heard that women attached great importance to clothes, and thought that she must suffer at having nothing nice. One day he held back some of his money, and went to buy her a present. He had wanted to get a silk dress, but it turned out that it cost more than he had, so he began searching for something cheaper. He had never been in ladies' shops before, and his eyes were dazzled by the endless buttons, handbags and handkerchiefs. Finally he bought a pair of gloves, beautiful kid gloves with embroidered gauntlets (the saleswoman told him that gauntlets were very fashionable). He thought that the gloves were very small, he was even afraid that she might not be able to get them on, but Sonechka laughed, thrust in one hand, and it appeared that they were far too big, it was just that the fingers were pleated so as to make them look smaller. ... It was a hard blow for the doctor. Sonechka forbade him to buy her any more gifts

and gave away the gloves to somebody for a birthday present. ...

For thirty years he dreamed of taking a boat trip with her down the Volga, of getting a good, comfortable cabin and letting her forget all about teeth and children and the house, and really rest—she was far too thin. He wanted to look after her, anticipate her wishes, let her feel how dearly he loved her, how much he wanted to do everything for her peace and happiness. At home he was not able to look after her, the children took up all their time, Sonechka was always busy, and if he wanted to help her, she would say: "Leave it alone, Nikolai, I'll see to that." And it always ended in her doing everything while he only hung about and hindered her. It was she who got wood in, she who saw after house repairs and redecorating. ...

"This summer I'm certainly taking you down the Volga," he would say every spring. But when summer came, it would turn out that the most sensible thing was to spend it in a summer cottage at Pargolov or Tarkhovka, cheaper and simpler, that Igor was ill and could not be left, or that, he, the doctor, needed a new winter overcoat and there was no money to spare for the Volga.

So she never gave him a chance to look after her.

Perhaps she never knew how he loved her? He had never been good at talking about his feelings. He was absurd, he knew it well, people often laughed at him, and with reason, but she had always been so tender and considerate. ...

Clutching his greying head in his hands, he thought how terrible it was that it was not he, a man, called up to the war, who had given his life for what they all held dear, but they, peaceful women, so gentle and gay, so. ...

"My dear ones, my sainted ones, what could I do, I'm always with you, my own. ..."

PART III

Day

CHAPTER IX

JULIA DMITRIYEVNA

A LONG article appeared in one of the Moscow papers, signed: Military Doctor of 3rd Rank Suprugov. This article described the work of the medical staff of the hospital train, very modestly, mentioning no names: it spoke of the train repairs, the laundry and all the subsidiary work: the ideal organization of food supplies for the wounded: fresh meat, fresh eggs, fresh onions grown in boxes, home-made jam, dried mushrooms. A few appreciations by people who had visited the train were quoted. And the article ended by saying: "This is by no means all that we intend doing to improve the transport of the wounded and sick defenders of our country." The article produced a big impression in the train, it was much read and discussed.

Suprugov walked about with the half-shy, half-delighted air of a birthday-child.

Doctor Belov, having read it, asked Danilov:

"What do you make of that article, Ivan Egorich?"

"It's all right," said Danilov. "The results of experiments must be published, but our experience will not be of any use to the State unless our ideas are followed up all over the Union. This is a good idea of Suprugov's. It's only a pity that he's let his imagination run away with him: it's only our intention to grow onions."

"But pray, Ivan Egorich," said the doctor blushing, "Why does he write: 'we, we, we'? What have *we* got to do with it? Suprugov and I never bother ourselves with

matters of organization—it's you every time, but your name is not mentioned."

"Oh, that doesn't matter in the least," said Danilov.

The doctor made a face.

"You don't think he did it on purpose?"

"No," said Danilov, "I don't."

He was quite certain that Suprugov had done it on purpose. He pretended to himself that it did not matter to him. To hell with it, he wasn't working to get his name in the papers! But a worm gnawed at his mind: here he had spent sleepless nights thinking it all out, arranging; there were others, too, who had worked with him and planned and become excited—but not a word about them. The people who read the paper attributed the whole thing to the doctors.

To Suprugov he only said: "You've given us a lot of trouble, doctor. We'll have to start growing the onions at once."

Julia Dmitriyevna was the one who appreciated the article most—how well written it was! And how thoughtful of him to have made a special mention of the model state of the dispensary.

Julia Dmitriyevna's feeling for Suprugov was of a strength and magnitude that she had never before experienced.

Suprugov was the first man ever to seek her company. To begin with it was because Danilov was off hand with him, Faïna frightened him with her advances, and the others, although they laughed at his stories and jokes, turned away indifferently when they ended. In Julia Dmitriyevna's presence he felt more confidence in himself, he saw that she was always sympathetic and kindly disposed towards him, although he had no idea of the reason. At first it was simple friendship, and then suddenly, after his mother's death, he began to think—why should he not marry her?

Marry? ... There was something attractive about the idea.

First of all, the housekeeping ... after all, it was better

to have a woman in the house, and not have to worry about dinner, cleaning, washing, all those details like socks and ties. Live an intellectual life. Not have to go to the restaurants: undignified for a doctor, and the food there was nothing to boast about.

He recalled his flat, the painted boxes and jugs, the rose-pink venetian glasses with their rainbow reflections, and his heart contracted—charwomen would pinch everything.

After all, a man ought to be married. On the other hand literature and life were full of examples of the fickleness of people's emotions. Were there many steady, stable couples? Almost every family had its own tragedy. He wasn't afraid for himself. He would be an ideal husband no matter whom he married—provided his wife always considered his habits and demands. He was a home-loving person, he did not drink, did not flirt. The question was: would his wife have the same inclination for a decent regulated life? What if she suddenly wished to have people coming in every night? That meant expense, noise, cigarette-ends. ... Or she might fall in love with someone. Or be jealous of him. A woman's jealousy was almost always without foundation. ... Or she might want to have children. And children brought untidiness everywhere, broke everything. Julia Dmitriyevna would surely want children. He grinned sarcastically: motherhood did not quite suit her, did it? After all, there were plain women who if they were well dressed. ... H'm, just imagine her all dressed up!

But to make up for that she evidently liked him. She was very sensible, and a good housewife. She would worship him. ...

But would she?

If one took into consideration that she was an old maid, then she ought to be eternally grateful and devoted to him for marrying her. ...

But something told Suprugov that as soon as Julia Dmitriyevna was married, she would be making demands of her husband that he, Suprugov, would find it difficult to carry out.

"She'd expect me to be interested in social questions," he reflected. "Not so difficult to get a reputation for it, and I wouldn't have anything against that, it gives you a certain standing and prestige. ... But she'd want me to be really interested in it all, and I'd have to pretend that I was, and give up my whole life to it. ... She'd want to have a child and she'd have one, too, whatever I could put forward against it. Of course, she'd give a solid base to my life, because she's got a wonderfully strong, masculine character, but wouldn't it be too strong and too masculine? Wouldn't she crush me entirely with that strong will of hers? There'd be order in the home, but it would be her kind of order and all I could do would be to submit without a word. It's delightful when a wife's on her knees to her husband, happy to anticipate his wishes. But can I imagine Julia Dmitriyevna in that position? Of course not, there'd be no question of my being the head of the house. ..."

Nevertheless, he hovered under the wing of that strong and direct spirit in which he sensed a protector. To do him justice, it was not Julia Dmitriyevna's looks that caused him to hesitate, for although he of course could see how extremely unattractive she was as a woman, he could also see the deference, almost timidity, with which she was generally regarded on the train, and it flattered him to feel that this proud, authoritative woman, respected by everybody, was taken up with him, Suprugov, that she liked talking to him and evidently enjoyed his company. It was the first time that any serious type of woman had shown any interest in him.

With Julia Dmitriyevna he could speak of anything under the sun and she listened with such attention that he began to grow in his own estimation. He took this attention to be due to his, Suprugov's, exceptional qualities; the fact that she had been the first to perceive and appreciate them, raised her value enormously in his eyes.

He told her, laying it on thick, about his hard, hungry youth, of how he had loaded barges in his student years

and ruined his health, how later his true value had been acknowledged and his practice had grown, how he had built himself a comfortable nest, and his late mother—God be her judge, as they say—had never looked after him but kept running out of the comfortable nest to waste his hard-earned money on card games, and he had always really been very lonely, very. ...

"I hope," he said one day, "that my loneliness will not be for ever. I am almost certain that it will soon end."

Her heart trembled at that empty phrase. ... And when another day it came into his head to describe his apartment and even draw a plan of it, she thought: perhaps I am destined to live in that apartment?

She could conceal her emotions from everybody else, but not from Faïna, who had a quick instinct for a romance even with only trifles of evidence to go on, and regarded the affair with the utmost benevolence. It was true that Faïna was angry with Suprugov for not paying any attention to her, and there was no other woman whom she would have permitted to stand in her path; but not to stand in the way of Julia Dmitriyevna was such a humane act that Faïna, who liked to pose, now saw herself as the guardian angel of this love which was in process of being born. In order not to impede the course of the romance she began finding every excuse to leave the compartment when Suprugov visited it, so there was nobody to disturb Julia Dmitriyevna's talks with Suprugov when the train was running empty. True, the compartment door was always open—both of them were careful of that, and Julia Dmitriyevna first and foremost. She cherished her reputation.

"I have loved twice in my life," said Suprugov, "but love never gave me real happiness."

The first time he fell in love was as a student. It was at the start of the New Economic Policy in 1923—everybody was cold and hungry. Zinochka wore wooden sandals tied to her feet with straps. Sometimes the strap would tear in the street and Zinochka would hop on one leg into a doorway and fix her shoe with a safety-pin.

Suprugov went about in shabby trousers and ate in the students' canteen. He met Zinochka at little parties. In spite of hunger their friends were very gay for they were all still very young. They waltzed and sang:

“And before him the marquise lowered her beautiful eyes.”

They went to the cinema, he and Zinochka, and saw *Forget the Fireplace* and *Triumphant Satan*. When the lights went out he took her tenderly by the arm. He undoubtedly was in love, jealous even of the young man on the screen.

In the summer they went walking in the churchyard. The churchyard was a rich one and kept in good order. Marble angels with one foot gracefully perched in the air stood among the flower-beds in the grass. Under their slightly dusty wings, Suprugov permitted himself to kiss Zinochka. It would have all been very pleasant if Zinochka hadn't behaved so exactly, even rudely. She wasn't a doll, she said, she was alive, she wouldn't allow anybody to treat her like that. If he didn't like her enough—they would have to part.

Suprugov tried to prove that no good would come of their union: they were too young, too unorganized. But Zinochka was firm. Her whim had to be satisfied. A woman's caresses gave him minutes of happiness, but after returning home from a meeting with Zinochka he always felt that he was doing something wrong. He had always been ashamed of his frayed trousers, now he felt positively inferior in them.

Zinochka demanded that he should go with her to the registrar's. He went, fearing that he would be called a scoundrel if he didn't. But in the bottom of his heart he thought it was all out of place. After the registrar's they still lived under separate roofs—she in a very small room with Papa and Mama, and he in a still smaller one with his mother. Zinochka's Papa and Mama were against Suprugov in his trousers encroaching upon their eleven

square metres with its hot iron stove in the middle. Suprugov's mother, a large and light-hearted woman would have gladly welcomed Zinochka in her six and a half square metres, but here Suprugov revealed iron determination: none of that, if you please. He couldn't think of it. He had to work somewhere. Tears and rows did not help. Zinochka had to give in. So they lived on—neither lovers, nor husband and wife—heaven alone knows what, without poetry, with nothing but discomfort and humiliation. Zinochka was to blame for it all. He had warned her. Suddenly she became pregnant. She couldn't have done anything more disastrous. On hearing the news an icy shudder ran down Suprugov's spine.

A child? His parents-in-law would immediately pack it off with Zinochka to Suprugov, to his six and a half square metres. They were hard and self-absorbed. The future of Suprugov didn't interest them. It would mean squeals, pots, nappies from morning till night. He would go mad.

And the expense of keeping the child. He'd have to leave the university and go as an assistant doctor to the country.

He decided not to surrender. He demanded that Zinochka should have an abortion. It was her own fault, after all. And there was nothing so dreadful about it. Thousands of women. ...

Here Zinochka's mama interfered. She said: "That's enough ! You've destroyed Zinochka's life; I won't let you destroy her health." How she shouted at him! She even called him a scoundrel. On hearing that Zinochka shouted. Zinochka's papa shouted at them both. Mother and daughter began to sob and kiss. Suprugov was silent—his knees trembled. ... Mama said, wiping her tears: "Go away, I don't want to see you." He went.

Zinochka had an abortion all the same and came back to him; thin and less attractive. But in the meantime he had got a divorce. He had gone to the registrar and

divorced. What a horrid story to have dragged him into, to be sure, and then to shout at him on the top of it. He'd had enough.

But he fell in love once again. Maybe the old-fashioned books are right and the world does move round love.

A patient had come one day. It was a joy to remember her little nose, her little ears. ... She was of a much firmer and decided nature than Zinochka, but at the same time—how charming and feminine in all her aspects. ...

Their liaison was short but stormy. She adored him. She gave him a present every day. Pretty little presents, antique stuff, he still cherished them. But it turned out later that she expected the same from him. She was very greedy; her husband was earning a lot of money, while Suprugov had a mother and had only just started to live decently. No, he was, on principle, against love that sells itself for money or presents. To put it shortly, she began by making nasty remarks, then it came to rows. He understood that a break was imminent. And in fact they soon separated. It was a pity, it had been a lovely incident, but maybe love is only beautiful in books, and in real life these great passions bring one less joy than grief.

When told by Suprugov both these love stories sounded very sweet. His own part in them seemed a sad and noble one. And Julia Dmitriyevna who *wanted* him to be sad and noble, listened to him with bated breath. For the first time she realized the mysteries of man's fate. For the first time her honest heart knew jealousy. She was jealous of these two women. She had not been jealous about Professor Skuderevsky, but this time she was jealous. Professor Skuderevsky had been an illusion, while Suprugov, to her torment and her joy, gradually became a hope.

New people appeared on the train.

Danilov needed a carpenter, a man who could do all kinds of fiddling jobs—fastenings for stretchers, back-

rests, small, delicate apparatus for remedial exercises. Another thing Danilov wanted was small hanging cupboards for the Krieger coach, one for each cot—movable cupboards which could be placed at any distance from the wounded man's hand, where he could keep his tobacco, books and other trifles. And in the coaches with hard seats it would be a good thing to have stools between the bunks, instead of small tables.

"If only the Lord would send me a carpenter," said Danilov.

At Ivanovo station the Lord sent him Boguchov, Uncle Sasha.

Uncle Sasha had been a conductor on the railway, while his family had lived in Luga—his mother, wife, widowed sister, two daughters and a young niece. Uncle Sasha used to refer to them as "my six women." When the Germans approached Luga, Uncle Sasha left with a train taking evacuees, and brought his six women with him. He was not able to arrange for them to be in the first coach, where he was conductor, so he delivered them over to an old friend of his, a splendid fellow, who was conductor of the last coach. On the way the Germans bombed the train, the last two coaches were hit and not a single person was saved. Uncle Sasha helped to pull the dead out from under the wreckage: he found his six women and his old friend, the splendid fellow. ... Uncle Sasha was ill for a long time. He was in the mental hospital in Ivanovo for nearly eighteen months before he was discharged as cured, and it was there that Danilov picked him up.

Uncle Sasha fixed up a small workbench in the isolation coach and set to work. He had lively, merry ways and a delicate touch, just what Danilov wanted. First of all he made various kinds of apparatus for physical training—for exercising the legs and the fingers. All this he did in his free time, since the regulations did not provide for a carpenter on a hospital train, and officially Uncle Sasha was conductor in the dispensary coach.

Uncle Sasha had evidently recovered from his grief in the mental home, for he never spoke of the past, and nobody ever saw him sad or downhearted. Only he had to be doing something all the time, if he was idle he would become restless and his hands began trembling When he was on duty, sitting beside the stove in the furnace-room of the dispensary coach, he would knit stockings—as he had learned to do in the asylum.

Uncle Sasha could sing, and had probably once had a very pleasant tenor, and although it was now on the weak side, he could still tackle the high notes with verve, his whole body taut and the small face with long whiskers flushed crimson. After a drawn out note, Uncle Sasha would strike a chord on his guitar and smile all over his face, as though to say: "See that, now!" He only sang the old songs—*Now Oleg Goes into Battle, The Fire of Moscow Flamed and Roared, My Campfire*. When he began singing *Oleg*, the listeners would gradually steal out of the coach, for there was no end to the song.

One day Danilov heard him.

"You ought to sing for the wounded," he said. Uncle Sasha caught him up at once.

"Yes," he said, "the army boys enjoyed listening to me on the stations, I even had a success with the higher officers. There was a lieutenant-general who gave me a hundred cigarettes for *The Fire of Moscow*."

After that, when treatment was finished, and supper began, Uncle Sasha would put on a white overall over his padded jacket, comb his whiskers, take up his guitar and go visiting the coaches.

It would be difficult to explain the secret of his popularity, but of the popularity itself there could be no doubt. He would place a stool in the middle of the coach, seat himself upon it and begin *My Campfire Shines Through the Mist*. "This knot which you tied on my heart, Who will untie it to-morrow ..." he sang, shaking his whiskered head sadly, and nobody laughed. But when he left to pass on into the next coach, he would be followed by shouts:

"Uncle, sing something else! Don't let him go, make him sing some more!"

Uncle Sasha accompanied some of his songs with political commentary. Having sung a song about Napoleon, he stopped and said:

"Hitler overlooked that historical factor."

And then he would return to his passionate chords.

"Fate plays havoc with man.
She is a fickle wench,
Carries him up in the air
And throws him shamelessly down."

"Again! Again!" they cried from the benches.

Danilov said to the Komsomols:

"When will you form an entertainment group of your own?" And upbraided their organizer, Nurse Smirnova.

"How often have I suggested it? It is your duty, you young people. Look at this sick old man, what a lot of pleasure he is able to give."

So at his suggestion a group was formed. The personnel needed it more than the wounded. They all suddenly wanted to dance and sing. Nizvetsky and Faina and even Sukhoyedov joined in—he could play the balalaika. Danilov bought a few string instruments, the girls started learning from Sukhoyedov and Uncle Sasha. Fat Iya unexpectedly revealed great talent—she proved to be an excellent compère. She did not have a very subtle humour, but she did have spontaneous malice and a flair for quick repartee.

"What a clever girl," thought Danilov.

The Red Army drove the Germans from Stalingrad and began pushing them off Russian soil. It meant hard fighting, and plenty of work for the hospital train.

Further and further west the army drove the enemy, and one after another, districts which they had occupied were freed. From these districts came such a wave of human suffering, there was such devastation, so many

people without homes, so many orphans, that it stunned anyone new to it.

At a steppe station where only scorched chimneys were standing and all offices had been huddled together in a hastily built wooden hut, Vaska appeared in the hospital train—a thin, haggard girl with fair braids delicate as silk, and grey eyes. It was Kostritsyn who brought her.

"Here you are," he said. "A real collective farmer knows more about it than I do. And for fit men to look after chickens—there's not an army regulation in the world that provides for that, whatever you say."

"How old are you?" asked Danilov.

"Seventeen," replied Vaska.

"Where are you from?"

"Petryayeva village. It isn't there any more."

"In ruins, is it?"

"They burned it," Vaska sighed softly. As she replied to his questions, she was examining Danilov and Julia Dmitriyevna who was standing beside him, with her light, rather prominent eyes. Her speech was quick and breathless, as though she had been stayed in full flight.

"Got your papers?"

"Yes," and Vaska pulled out from under her blouse a carefully folded paper with the ink smudged as though from tears. The paper said that in 1941 Vaska Burenko had passed her fifth class examinations at the Sagaidak secondary school in the Ukraine with honours.

"That's no identity paper," said Danilov.

"What is it then?" asked Vaska.

"How did you get here from the Ukraine?"

"We just came here. We wanted to get away from the Germans. And then they came here, too."

"Have you any relations here?" asked Julia Dmitriyevna.

"Yes," said Vaska. "My Granny. Only she's not here, but nearby, at Likhoreva, just over there across the forest stream, six kilometres away."

"And why have you left your Granny?"

"She's living with people she knows, but I don't want to. Their cottage has been burned, too, they're living in a dugout."

"And your father and mother?"

"I've no mother. Dad—I don't know where he is. At the front. I've heard nothing about him."

Vaska told this in the same easy tones as the rest, only her light brows drew together painfully.

"I'll take you," said Danilov. "Only one condition—tell the truth in future. You're not seventeen."

"I am, really and truly. Cross my throat and die," said Vaska.

"And what age did you tell the Germans you were, so that they wouldn't take you to Germany?" asked Danilov, who knew something of regulations in the occupied areas.

"Thirteen," said Vaska.

Danilov and Julia Dmitriyevna laughed.

"That sounds more like the truth," said Danilov. "Well, and what's your name?"

"Vaska."

"Well, Vaska, then," said Danilov.

Vaska's belongings consisted of a bundle rolled in a grey checked shawl, a huge man's greatcoat over her shoulders, and thin boots.

"What have you got here?" asked Julia Dmitriyevna, pointing to the bundle. "Maybe you'd like to leave it?"

"Nay," said Vaska, clutching it to her bosom.

She was thinking—what was going to happen to her now? Would they give her something to eat before they began to teach her how to be a nurse? But Julia Dmitriyevna took her to an ordinary goods coach. First she came into a sort of cubby hole, with two piglets behind bars, plump and clean, snuffling and chewing. "How clean they are," thought Vaska, "don't even smell of dung." Julia Dmitriyevna opened a low door and Vaska found herself in a more roomy part with large bowls and rubbing boards hanging on the walls. Along two of the sides there were metal tables, and by the third some-

thing she could not understand—like a huge cupboard painted green, with thin pipes, and a large thermometer fastened to the side. A man in a white overall was standing looking at this thermometer with his hands behind his back. "A doctor," thought Vaska.

"Sukhoyedov," said Julia Dmitriyevna, "finish the overalls, call a nurse and let her wash this new girl and disinfect her clothes. Sit down," she added to Vaska, and went. Vaska seated herself on a stool. It was hot in the coach, and there was an acid smell.

Suddenly Vaska jolted, swayed and nearly fell from her stool. She clutched at the metal table to steady herself.

"Lord-a-mercy, we're off!" she thought.

A pile of blue quilts was lying on the table. Sukhoyedov counted them, said: "Nineteen," sighed and looked at Vaska, who decided that it was time to start up a conversation.

"Uncle," she said, "what are you going to do with 'em?"

"Push them in there, that's all," replied Sukhoyedov, examining this unabashed girl, and thinking: What's this kid doing here?

"What for?" asked Vaska.

"To boil 'em."

"What for?"

"Get rid of microbes."

"They die?"

"All of 'em."

Vaska was silent.

"Uncle," she said after a little while. "Why am I sitting here?"

"Waiting your turn."

"My turn where?"

"Here's a bright spark," thought Sukhoyedov. "Knee high to a grasshopper, and perky as you please." Aloud he only said: "In twenty minutes I'll take out the overalls, and then you'll go in."

"Where?" asked Vaska.

"Where! There—to the sterilizing chamber," and Sukhoyedov began unscrewing and screwing things on the green object.

"How many degrees?" asked Vaska.

"A hundred and four."

There was a long silence.

"Uncle."

"What?"

"And if I don't want to?"

"Doesn't matter if you want to or not," said Sukhoyedov. "All of us have to get through that, from the doctors to the stokers."

Vaska nodded. "Well," she thought, "if they've all done it, then it won't kill me." She wanted to crawl into that green thing as soon as possible to see what happened.

Sukhoyedov began to feel sorry for her.

"You needn't be frightened."

"I'm not frightened, Uncle."

Vaska was given an old overall with torn fastenings and a piece of muslin to tie round her head. The overall was too long, so Vaska took a pair of scissors, cut off the bottom and hemmed the edge, and then sewed fastenings on to the neck and sleeves. When she saw how Sister Faïna arranged her muslin in a turban, she wanted to do the same, but Julia Dmitriyevna told her: "Cover your head properly."

Vaska was too young to be a nurse, so she was handed over to Uncle Sasha as his assistant and pupil. The dispensary coach pleased her greatly. The walls were as white as those of her Ukrainian cottage which the Germans had burned, and everything so clean and beautiful. Heavens above!

Vaska used to sit in the furnace-room, but it was clean there too, and warm. And outside it was cold, damp spring weather.

Uncle Sasha told Vaska.

"We haven't got just ordinary passengers, ours are precious ones, people who've lost their health and strength for us, and they're weak from loss of blood, they

like it warm. It's for us conductors to see that it is so. But then again, we mustn't waste coal. Mind ye—keep your eye on it, open the door and close the damper, or the other way round. Ye'll learn to get over the difficulties. The ration's strict, and when the frost's hard we need six buckets a day, and sometimes seven. It's up to us to see there's enough coal."

Uncle Sasha had his own way of seeing that there was enough coal. When they arrived at a station, he would take a bucket and go off to steal some. Once the railway guard caught him and took him off to Railway Transport Officer, and Danilov had to come and get him out.

After seeing that the furnace was in order, Vaska would go and stand at the window, waiting for the washroom door to open, as it often did—and then she would get a glimpse of that white paradise with palms in tubs, shining things on the walls and the mirror on the door to the surgery. Wounded men would be sitting on folding chairs or on the divan with its white cover, waiting their turn while the radio played softly. Everything was so well-ordered and comfortable, so pleasant, so different from all the horrors which had surrounded Vaska during the occupation. ...

The wounded men were all dressed alike in soft blue dressing gowns, and here the noisiest of them sat quietly, without smoking, turning the pages of magazines. Vaska thought that they must all be afraid of Julia Dmitriyevna.

Julia Dmitriyevna came to the surgery at six in the morning, and left at eleven at night. Vaska tried to count how many wounded passed through the surgery in a day: before dinner-time she had got to forty-six, and then she lost count. ... Dressings began immediately after breakfast and lasted till nine in the evening.

Sometimes the door to the washroom and that of the surgery opened simultaneously, and Vaska could see Julia Dmitriyevna, broad in her snow-white overall, her face red beneath her white kerchief and her hands equally red, raised to her face as though she were

threatening somebody. ... Or Vaska would see her bent over the operation table doing something mysterious and skilful. ...

Vaska stood there on the platform so quietly that even cross Sister Smirnova never drove her away.

After nine in the evening, the coach emptied, until only Julia Dmitriyevna and Klava (lucky Klava)! were left. Metal instruments rang in the surgery. Klava came running out for boiling water, there was a burning, acid smell. Then Julia Dmitriyevna, too, came out and Klava was left alone. As she washed and scoured everything, she sometimes let Vaska come into the washroom and even the physical training room, and walk along the soft drugget of the corridor, but the dispensary was always closed, and Klava would not allow her to go into the surgery. Klava was too tired to answer Vaska's questions, so the girl would walk quietly about the coach, looking into the mirror and stroking the hard, shining leaves of the palms.

About three in the morning Klava, swaying with weariness, would go to bed, and Vaska was left the mistress of all this magic kingdom. The surgery Klava locked, taking the key with her, but the washroom, too, was very interesting. She could lie down on the divan and look at the magazines, thinking to herself: here I am lying on a divan looking at magazines, with palm leaves over me. Anybody looking in would think—who's that girl lying there on the divan, what sort of life does she lead. ...

Vaska had a quick ear—as soon as a door banged in the distance she would jump up, smooth the cover of the divan so as to leave no trace, and run into the furnace-room. ...

But one night Uncle Sasha came in to check the furnace and caught her asleep on the divan. He could not rouse her at once, but when she wakened he began shouting and stamping his feet at her.

"What are you up to here? Eh, you ... " he hissed at her. "Wounded men sit here, and she lies down in her

dirty padded coat, and leaves microbes everywhere. ... If the political officer comes along?. ... Eh, what a girl! Now don't ye let me catch ye here again!"

He did not put in a complaint about Vaska, but he looked in every night when she was on duty and Vaska stopped lying on the divan, just to be on the safe side.

Danilov was no longer commissar. He had been appointed Deputy Chief for Political Affairs and promoted to Captain, Suprugov to Senior Lieutenant, Dr Belov to Major, while many of the women put on epaulettes with stars. Vaska stood on the platform thinking: "I'll have epaulettes too. I'll be theatre sister, like Julia Dmitriyevna. I'll know how to do everything like she does. If I want to, I'll learn to be a doctor too, don't worry. ..."

Julia Dmitriyevna noticed that Vaska was always hanging round the door of the washroom. "That girl's got sharp eyes," she thought. One day she came into the furnace-room and found Vaska, on her knees, putting an old tin on to the stove.

"You'll burn your hands, Vaska," said Julia Dmitriyevna. "What are you boiling there?"

"It's carpenter's glue for Uncle Sasha," Vaska replied.

"Be careful—it'll burn."

"No—I'll watch it."

The warm light from the stove fell on Vaska's face, giving it a transparent rose colour, and a broad band of shining gold lay over her hair. ... "Just a girl," thought Julia Dmitriyevna, "a child ..."

She reached out and awkwardly smoothed some strands of hair from Vaska's forehead.

"Keep your hair off your face," she said, as though ashamed of the caress. "Could you clothe the wounded men again after dressings?"

"Yes," said Vaska.

"You have to do it carefully, so that it doesn't hurt them, and quickly, because there are others waiting."

"I can be quick."

"Well, we'll see," said Julia Dmitriyevna.

As she went away, she glanced back at Vaska; the girl was stooping over the stove, and the end of her flaxen plait had fallen into the coalbox. ...

One day on the return journey, Julia Dmitriyevna met Vaska.

"Come to the surgery," she said. "I'll try to teach you a little. Get an overall from Klava."

And so Vaska entered the holy of holies, the dispensary coach.

Julia Dmitriyevna solemnly laid her hand on a round metal box, which shone like a mirror.

"That's a box."

"Yes," said Vaska.

"In the box I keep sterilized material. We sterilize it here, in the sterilizer."

"Sterilized—in the sterilizer," Vaska repeated all in one breath. Her eyes were glued to Julia Dmitriyevna's fingers.

"Repeat what I've told you," said Julia Dmitriyevna.

"That's a box," said Vaska at once, laying both hands on the shining lid.

"Don't touch it," said Julia Dmitriyevna, "never touch anything unless there's need. Hands are collectors and spreaders of infection, that's to say, illness."

But you touch them yourself, thought Vaska quickly, but without any sense of injury, and stored away another word in her mind—infection.

"Very well," said Julia Dmitriyevna, when the lesson ended. "You can go now."

"A wonderfully sensible girl," she told Danilov.

"Really?" he asked dubiously.

He had a deep respect for the surgery and its instruments, and he found it hard to believe that Vaska could be used for such delicate work.

"What gave you the idea of taking a pupil?" Suprugov asked Julia Dmitriyevna. "And such a child at that?"

"She's very interested in it," Julia Dmitriyevna replied. "If she's properly taught, we'll make something of her."

"But just think," said Suprugov, "you've so little time as it is."

"It's our duty to teach the young folks," said Julia Dmitriyevna in her own level, unbending tone.

One day Vaska dropped a syringe and broke it. Julia Dmitriyevna's eyes flashed and she sent the girl out of the surgery. While she was talking to Suprugov that evening she kept remembering Vaska—what was the girl doing now? She pictured Vaska sitting sadly before the open stove, the end of her plait in the coalbox, a golden band of light across her hair. ...

She probably won't come again, thought Julia Dmitriyevna.

But the next day Vaska came for her lesson as though nothing untoward had happened.

CHAPTER X

DOCTOR BELOV

A YEAR passed.

"How very strange," Belov wrote in his diary, "that the decoration was given not to D. but to me who have not distinguished myself in any way and all these years have been merely a doctor, often inattentive and careless (remember the tragic end of L.). I feel mortified. I told D. that I would do everything to see justice done. He thought it tactless of me. He tried to persuade me that I had deserved the decoration, he is a well-meaning person. I think he's getting thinner. He gives such a lot of time to organizing the train and keeping the staff in good working spirit that he makes me ashamed of my idleness. S. for instance, looks very well. He's even developing a belly. I believe he's upset that he hasn't been mentioned. I'm sorry, but I think he deserves a decoration as little as I do. He said to me: 'You must admit, Doctor, that were it not for my article we shouldn't have attracted attention so soon.' That is true. I reminded him that his speech at the military medical conference had also played a positive part. He had occupied the attention of the conference for forty minutes and the chairman hadn't stopped him although the rules were strict. They listened attentively, applauded often and laughed approvingly. Having started timidly, S. later on acquired firmness and ended up wittily and eloquently to thundering applause. In the interval we were surrounded by a group of delegates. Colonel Voronkov, the chief of the centre, shook us by the hand and expressed the desire that the file with our improvements should be handed to him direct and he would take it to Moscow, to the Chief Hospital Centre. All the same I couldn't help noting that in this, as well as in the article, S. didn't mention D. once and kept saying: "we,

we." I pointed this out to him. He answered: "In underlining the action of an individual one understates that of the community. I considered it unjust to the collective." We all like to talk about justice. ...

"I wanted to correct the mistake of S. with great tact, telling the conference who was the real initiator and inspirer of our improvements. But the next business was the struggle against the lack of vitamins and one couldn't return to our boilers and pigs. Besides, I speak badly, much worse than I write. But I made a report on D. and gave it to the colonel. I cannot get rid of the unpleasant thought that S. tries purposely to tone down D.'s part."

The fat squared exercise book was almost filled—the doctor's passion for his diary had returned. Like Uncle Sasha, he had to be occupied with something all the time; if he had nothing to do the inner force sustaining him seemed to drain away, his head would begin shaking, and memories would crowd in, rending his heart.

He tried to enter into all the life and affairs of the train, wrote about them, ran about driving away memories. ... But wherever he might be, beside him, there were two luminous faces, two images that lived for ever.

There was a third figure, too—the indistinct figure of his son.

Never a letter, never a sign that he lived. Was he killed? People had advised the doctor to write to Moscow, to a certain address, any information would be sent. He wrote, but there had as yet been no reply.

Of course he had been killed. What was he like when he died? How old was he, what did his face look like?

"We are travelling through the liberated districts of the Ukraine" wrote on the doctor, "and sometimes come fairly close to the front. The Germans have lost the air superiority which they possessed at the beginning of the war, and we have very little fear of raids. We are not yet accustomed to the sight of the terrible devastation they have left in our towns and villages, and we

often find it very painful. But to tell the truth, here I have come to realize the wisdom of the old proverb, 'In company even death is acceptable.' There has been so much suffering and loss among the civilian population in the places where the Germans have been, that I ..." (erased) "that to me ..." (erased). "I do not want to imply, of course, that it makes my own personal loss any easier to bear, or that it comforts me in any way, but ..." (erased).

"The stations are in ruins here, and in many of them there are no pumps, sometimes we have to bring water in buckets from the river or the well in order to fill the tanks. On these occasions, all take buckets and go for water, including the officers and N.C.O.'s. We fill the tanks, barrels, the boiler in the disinfection room, but all the same we have to economize with it, because we never know when we shall be able to take on fresh supplies. Near Brateshki our people found a cistern which had been pierced by a shell in four places. The railwaymen asked what the devil did a hospital train want with such rubbish. Bogushov and Protassov had to take the door of the baggage truck right off in order to get it in, and then replace it again. I.E. says that as soon as we come to some place where it can be done, he will have the holes in the cistern patched, and then we shall have an additional tank for two thousand litres of water. Kravtsov has thought of fixing a rubber tube to connect the cistern with the cauldrons in the kitchen coach, which is next to the baggage truck.

"I never cease wondering at our people, their patience, their industry, their inexhaustible ingenuity. I wonder at them and envy them, and want to be like them. ... "

The hospital train, running empty, stopped at K. ...; it was necessary to solder the cooking cauldrons. The halt would last for five days.

"I would like to go to Leningrad for a couple of days," Dr Belov told Danilov.

"What good will that do?" asked Danilov.

The doctor turned away and said nothing for a moment.

"I think I'll go, all the same," he said at last. "It won't affect things here, will it?"

"No, it won't," Danilov answered. "Go if you want."

He got the Commandant a comfortable seat in a goods wagon of the train taking evacuees back to Leningrad, and whispered something to the head conductor, who gave up his bed to the doctor.

The wagon was heated with a small iron stove, and was warm. The doctor offered tinned pork to the other people there, and felt awkwardly reluctant to use the bed until they forced him to do so.

From the conversation of the head conductor, it appeared that the hospital train was well known among railwaymen.

"There's been articles about you in the papers," he said. "They hold you up as an example ... always clean, even the outside of the coaches washed and the glass shining. Remember when you were stopped at Vologda, you were shunted on to the main track? A general had just arrived. He was in command of this railway, and the R.T.O. gave orders: put that lovely train in front of the office windows ..."

The doctor, blinking, remembered: yes, they *had* been shunted into the main platform, and the general had come to look at the train and had expressed his gratitude in the visitors' book. He must tell this to Danilov.

Today he found his inactivity especially tormenting. Sleep would not come to him, however hard he tried. He talked, he tried to read a novel which he found on the conductor's table, but the love troubles of the characters could not fix his attention. ... The conductor brought him the day's *Pravda*, and the doctor read it through from end to end, not omitting even the theatre announcements. *Ivan Susanin* at the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre, *Tsar Fyodor* at the Art Theatre. Everything as usual. Life went on.

He tried not to remember that the train was approach-

ing Leningrad, what he would find there, why he was going there. He was going for nothing. It was all imagination. Suffering had not cured him of his imagination.

A hundred times he had pictured it to himself, he had arrived in Leningrad. ...

In his dreams, too, he saw it. In his dreams, Sonechka and Lyalya were alive, the house was standing undamaged, they came out to meet him, laughing and talking. ... Alexander Ivanovich had mixed everything up, he was old and busy and got confused. He had another dream in which there was no house, only a tiny heap of ashes, and Sonechka and Lyalya stood beside it, alive, and explained that this pile of ashes was all that was left of their house.

The awakening after these dreams was the worst thing of all.

No, in his waking hours, of course, he had no hope of meeting Sonechka and Lyalya. Mistakes like that didn't happen. It was an old, kindly considerate, friend who had written, he himself had followed their remains to the grave. ...

In his waking hours his imagination pictured something else—he thought that in Leningrad he might find Igor. Igor was not dead.

The doctor would arrive in Leningrad and make his way home on foot. There was the mosque. (Sonechka had said that the minarets of the mosque were like snakes' heads. Another time she had said that the wings of the Kazan Cathedral embraced it and raised it from the earth. Sometimes, when the housekeeping got a bit too much for her, she would say: "I'm just sick of you all!" Then she would go out alone, go and look at the mosque, at the Kazan Cathedral and the Neva. Returning home, tired and gentle, with dusty shoes, she would ask apologetically: "Well, how have you been getting on without me? ..." and make tea.)

Here he would be walking along his own street, and in the distance he would see his ruined home. From another corner Igor, in his uniform, would come towards

the doctor. He would be tall and slender, slightly stooping, stumbling slightly. ... No, in the army they would have taught him to walk well. He would be holding himself erect and marching straight ahead. They would come closer to each other. "Dad!" Igor would say, and fling his arms round him. "Daddy! It's you! I didn't know you in your tunic ..." And they would both have tears of happiness in their eyes.

Or else ... Igor did not have any tears in his eyes, and didn't hasten to embrace him. "Hullo, Dad," he would say, holding out his hand. The doctor would swallow down the tears which even now were rising to his throat, he would stand beside his son and they would look at the ruins of their home. It would be getting dark. "Well, let's go," Igor would say, and they would go to Alexander Ivanovich to ask if they could spend the night there. Old Polina Alexeyevna, whom he had treated for inflammation of the liver, would open the door and throw up her hands in surprise. "Good gracious, it's you!" she'd cry. "And we've got Igor here, he's only just come. Igor! Come here!" But of course not—where would another Igor come from, he'd already found Igor, there he was, with him, they'd come to spend the night. His dreams were confused, his thoughts were confused, Polina Alexeyevna had died of starvation during the blockade. And it's only on the stage that such meetings happen, not in real life. ...

But what does happen? Is there anything at all? Or is there nothing left in the world but grief?

Finally he fell asleep. When he awakened it was evening, the lamp was burning, and the truck was empty. The train had stopped. The doctor had sat up on the bed and was wondering how to find out if there was much further to go, when the head conductor entered and said:

"Leningrad."

The halt at K. would be a long one, and as there was a lull, Danilov allowed part of the staff to go out.

The girls cleaned their topboots, powdered their noses, examined themselves in their mirrors and ran off to the town to walk about the streets, look at the civilians and go to the cinema. Vaska and Iya went to the hairdresser. It was very warm there and there was a sickly sweet perfume. A grey-haired cloakroom attendant rather like Dr Belov told them to take off their outdoor things, so they obediently removed their greatcoats and sat down on chairs.

Everything in the place was of absorbing interest, not in the least like real life. In one corner two women were sitting at a small table; one of them wore a white overall and was doing something with tiny clippers to the fingers of the second one.

"What's that?" asked Vaska.

"Idiot!" whispered Iya. "That's a manicure."

Women, young and old, were sitting in armchairs in front of tall mirrors that reflected their submissive faces, and their necks swathed in towels. Hairdressers—young and middle-aged hovered round these women, scissors snipped, tufts of dark and light hair fell. One brunette was sitting meekly with some thick paste on her eyebrows and lashes. A girl hairdresser blew on her long tongs and began winding the brunette's hair round them. Steam rose. The brunette blinked her thickly-smeared lashes cautiously and endured it all.

But what was happening in the next room was beyond everything. A woman was sitting there with forty electric wires, or may be more, stretching from her head to the wall. She could not even move her head, only her eyes.

"What's that?" asked Vaska with passionate interest.

"A permanent wave," Iya replied.

A hairdresser came to the woman with the wires and began to work on her head just like Nizvetsky with his fuse-board.

The woman at the table rose and began waving her hands, while Vaska admired her nails, bright red and shining like bonbons.

The brunette also rose, and Vaska was amazed to see how beautiful she was. Her hair lay on her head in tight little sausages, her lashes were coal black and curled upward, while her eyebrows—could there ever be anything so lovely?—long, reaching from nose to temples, and fine and even, as eyebrows never are in reality.

Vaska burned with a bitter envy. She wanted to be as beautiful as that.

"Sit down, girls," said the hairdresser.

Iya sat down before a mirror, while Vaska decided to have a manicure. The water in the tiny bowl was scalding hot, and the manicurist, wrestling with Vaska's fingers, hard and roughened with manual work, cut her twice so that the blood flowed, but Vaska never blinked an eyelid—other people stood it, and she could.

She regarded her bright-red nails with passionate admiration. "What lovely nails that girl's got," everybody would say. "Just look at those nails!"

She sat down before a mirror.

"Permanent?" asked the hairdresser.

Vaska wanted to assent but Iya interrupted.

"We'll not have time for a perm., we've got to be back in an hour. Have a wave."

"A wave," Vaska whispered.

The hairdressers put all their hearts into the work. They liked these girls in military uniform, they kept questioning them as to who they were, where had they come from and where had they been. Other customers joined in, and the conversation became general, even the manicurist and the old cloakroom attendant taking part. Only the woman with the wires was silent, peering out from the neighbouring room like a spider.

"Eyebrows, girls?" asked the hairdresser, and before Vaska had time to more than nod, she had seized a razor and shaved off nearly the whole of them.

"Oh!" gasped Vaska. "Isn't that too thin?"

"You like them broad?" asked the hairdresser. "We'll make them broad, then."

At last the delightful procedure came to an end.

"There's a six months' guarantee," said the hairdresser, looking affectionately at Vaska. "Don't worry, dear, they won't wash off and won't fade, nothing will affect them. Wear them and enjoy them."

Vaska and Iya paid, put on their greatcoats and set off for the station, followed by hearty good wishes.

Danilov was walking up and down by the train.

"What in the world's that?" he said as his eye fell on Vaska.

On her fair, freckled, childish face, thick black brows stretching from nose to temple seemed to leap out and hit the eye. They made her face look older, lugubrious and threatening.

"Been to a beauty parlour?" asked Danilov, seeing the curls peeking out from under their caps and sniffing the eau-de-cologne. "Well, a wave—that's all right. But as for those—wash them off."

Vaska stood to attention.

"Permit me to report," she began with a short-lived formality, "they won't wash off and they won't fade, not if you try ever so."

"I'll wash them off!" said Danilov. "They'll come off for me!"

"Nay, that they won't," said Vaska.

The same day there was another newspaper article about the train: Danilov read it with interest and again some things seemed too favourably exaggerated, others left unsaid. He read it once more and laughed to himself: he had missed a lot in the first reading—almost the most interesting item. The article was not so much about the train, as about Dr Suprugov. "Dr Suprugov told us with what enthusiasm the personnel of the hospital train carried the very heavy cistern into the luggage van on their shoulders. ... Dr Suprugov says ... Dr Suprugov shows us. ..." Suprugov, everywhere Suprugov! Showing, describing, inspiring! What a cunning old son of a bitch! Danilov roared with laughter as he lay stretched out on the sofa.

In this condition Julia Dmitriyevna found him.

"What are you laughing at?"

He handed her the paper.

"I've read it. You find it funny? I didn't see anything funny about it." She had loved that article. Suprugov's name, repeated many a time, caused her a secret satisfaction.

The chief conductor had asked the doctor to stay with him all night. He obeyed. He moved to the bench and sat there in silence. The young man brought some wood, lit the stove and boiled the kettle for tea. They poured out a mug for the doctor who drank it. A young lad kept following the conductor about with a box of chess figures and repeating: "Let's play, Mishka." Mishka didn't reply.

"Let's play" the other one drawled.

"I've beaten you often enough at it, do you want more?" asked Mishka.

"I see now what was wrong," said the lad, "I'll change my tactics."

Finally Mishka agreed to play. He won very quickly and said:

"To hell with you, you keep losing all the time, it's no fun."

And they both lay down to sleep on the cases. And the night went by.

The doctor said goodbye to the chief conductor, climbed out of the wagon and went home.

From Nevsky he turned off along Liteyny, from Liteyny along Pestel Street, past the Mikhailov castle, across Marsovo, past the Suvorov memorial over Kirov Bridge on to Petrogadsky—the route he had travelled so often in his day-dreams.

If anybody had asked him how Nevsky looked and what he had seen on Liteyny, he could not have told them. He had noticed nothing, he even passed the mosque unseeing.

The light increased as he approached his house.

That was the house. ... But it was just the same as it had always been! Ah, yes, he remembered, he had been told that plywood camouflage was used so that the ruins should not be so painfully visible, and the streets should have something of their normal appearance. The house had been painted on plywood, it looked quite real. But actually, it wasn't there. ...

He couldn't go inside.

He went out into the middle of the street in order to get a better view of the sham house; suddenly a faint, dizzy feeling overcame him, and when he came to himself he was sitting on a trunk in the porter's lodge. The porter, a woman, was standing over him, saying:

"Sofia Leontyevna ought to have been able to see him, what a fine young man he's grown. God give him long life."

The porter seemed to know him, but he could not remember her at all, and said so.

"But I'm Washday's sister, don't you remember?"

He remembered Washday, but he could not remember ever having seen this woman, her sister. She continued talking, but at first he could not take in what she was saying. Suddenly it began to dawn upon him and he rose, but his knees buckled under him.

Igor had been there a month previously, he had sat here in the porter's lodge and asked Washday's sister all about how his mother and sister had died. He had shed no tears, and told her nothing about himself, only asked question after question. He had asked where his father was, but she had no address. He had written a note and left it there in case his father should come; he had left notes with all the friends he had come across, he said.

"Where's the note?" asked the doctor.

Her sister had put it away, the woman said, but she was at work, she was on the night shift and she should soon be home. And finally she did come, not soon, it seemed a hundred years before she came, very old, but still working. And her daughter Lida was working too,

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she said, and was married and expected a child. ... For another age Washday searched for the note which Lida had taken to read and pushed away somewhere, then she found it, it was in the doctor's hand.

"Father, where are you? Are you alive? I long for you to be alive," he read, and then a few more words and five figures—the field post office, his son's address, the army address, a living address. ... I'm alive, Igor! We're both alive! We'll finish our job and then we'll meet again. All right? I'm alive, my boy, I'm alive!

CHAPTER XI

LENA

ALL this time in the hospital train, everybody was studying. Julia Dmitriyevna conducted courses among the sisters in the use of surgical instruments and complicated bandaging. The nurses attended lectures given by the doctors. Sister Faïna worked for a month at a hospital, specializing in physiotherapy. Sister Smirnova went to a course in remedial exercise. Fima, the kitchen maid, was sent to a cookery course, returned with a good certificate, and was made cook—the former one had not pleased the wounded.

Lena liked the light, well-made apparatus for the remedial exercises, and she soon learned from Smirnova the simple principles of the work. She had more success in remedial work, too, because as a former sports instructor she was familiar with the secrets and possibilities of the human body, of which Smirnova was ignorant.

"Ogorodnikova's become much more serious," said Julia Dmitriyevna.

Lena smiled to herself—she was just the same as she had always been.

Nobody could handle the wounded men as she could, and if they got one with a specially difficult temperament, he was put in Lena's charge; she would keep him quiet.

"What do you do to make them so tractable?" the nurses asked her.

"I don't know," replied Lena.

She would talk to a man to make him forget his pain, ask who he was, where he came from, what school he had been at, and about his family. There were plenty of things you could ask a person. If they cried she stroked their heads, kissed them and comforted them. When they were capricious, she did not irritate them but tried

to do all they wanted, and joked with them until they laughed too. ...

She was promoted to junior sergeant, and put on her epaulettes with the same gay satisfaction with which she had once pinned on sports medals.

"Eh, Lenochka, you're getting older!" said fat Iya sadly.

Lena looked into her tiny palette-shaped mirror—yes, there were lines round her eyes—where had they come from? And she was pale, because she hadn't enough air and was out of training; after all, since childhood she had been used to doing exercises every day.

Never mind, it would soon all be over, she'd get into training again, teach the children, win prizes in competitions and love Danya, love Danya!

There had been no letter from him.

Soon the war would end, the Germans were being thrashed on foreign soil now, in Poland, the train was going abroad for wounded. Those damned Germans, why didn't they hurry up and surrender? Well, let them get thrashed and thrashed again and again for breaking up her life.

One day she came very near to believing that Danya was dead. Why was that? Because the weather was very dismal and depressing, the rain poured down for the fourth day running, and they had had to put on the lights during the daytime. Everybody was feeling depressed. Suddenly Nadya received a letter saying that her fiancé had been killed—while she was getting ready to go and see him he had been moved to the Front, and had died while forcing some little stream that wasn't even marked on the map. His comrades had written to Nadya to tell her. As she was trying to comfort the girl, the thought suddenly struck Lena like a blow—what if Danya was killed too? ... But it was only a momentary weakness. Death could never triumph over them.

Soon the end would come and they would meet again. More and more often Lena began looking into the mirror, and one day she realized that she really was

going off, losing her looks—at twenty-five! She was outraged, she was frantic, everything inside her screamed No!

"It is because I am living without happiness," she thought, "I'm beating down the desire for happiness, every day trampling on it, pushing it further and further down. ... I can't go on like this. Comrades, hurry, hurry! Hurry up and make an end of the fascists, before I wither up altogether for lack of happiness!"

Why does no one fall in love with me? Someone must. No matter who. Nizvetsky, for instance. He is ill, the poor man. Never mind, she thought, I don't care whether he is sick or well. Let him fall in love, that's all I mind about. She started putting herself in Nizvetsky's way and sat down or stood so that he should see her face. She joked and laughed, and half-closed her eyes—all so that he should fall in love with her. She did not address him, but talked with the others. He gaped at her, bewildered and sad, his eyebrows unattractively raised, his yellow forehead wrinkled, while she thought cold-bloodedly:

"Now go on, fall in love, quickly."

He did, very quickly. He began to pass through her coach frequently. She did not even turn her head towards him. That's it, pass along, that's all I want of you!

At Julia Dmitriyevna's request, Vaska was appointed nurse and transferred to the sixth coach.

A mishap occurred in the sixth coach while Vaska was on night duty—blood began soaking through the bandages round the stump of an arm amputation case. Vaska, going the rounds, noticed a dark patch on the pillow, looked more closely—blood! The man was asleep. Vaska hurried to the next coach and asked the nurse on duty to run for Sister Faïna, then returned, took a clean sheet and went to the man. As ill-luck would have it he was sleeping soundly and she was afraid to awaken him—it might disturb the others.

"Uncle!" she whispered desperately in his ear. "U-u-uncle! Oh, *Uncle!*"

"What's up?" asked the man, starting up.

"Keep quiet, Uncle, don't get excited, but you're bleeding," said Vaska.

She made a tourniquet for his shoulder out of the sheet and began tightening it, bracing her knee against the bed and setting her teeth.

"Uncle!" she panted. "Help me a bit with your good hand."

"Well, come along then," said the man. "Let me twist it. Is it still bleeding?"

"Yes. Tighter, Uncle."

When the sisters and Dr Belov arrived, the bleeding had already stopped, the man was lying on a clean sheet, and Vaska was eating a sweet which he had given her.

"I'm going to mention you in the day's orders," the doctor told Vaska. "You're a grand girl."

"Julia Dmitriyevna taught me, and I did as she said," Vaska replied, her cheek bulging with the sweet.

The train was running empty along the Southern Line.

"This is my part of the country," Vaska told Lena, as she stood at the window.

It was early winter, and fluffy snow covered the vast Ukrainian fields, covered the ashes and piles of rubble at the stations, the trail of the German beast. Vaska had folded her arms as old women do, across her narrow chest.

"There'll be three oaks in a minute," she said, "they're a good bit off yet. First there'll be Sagaidak station, even if it's not there any more I know the place, I went to school there. And then nearer Yereski, our collective farm. ..."

Somebody called Lena, and no more was said. Vaska remained by the window. The three oaks flashed by. Vaska started back from the window, with a single motion, flung on her overcoat and shawl and dashed out to the door. She thought that the train would stop at

Sagaidak, but it raced past the snow-covered hut that marked the place where the station buildings had been. The next station would be Yereski, the train was sure to stop there; with her own ears Vaska had heard Kravtsov say to Protassov: "We'll buy it in Yereski."

Oh, that snow, that snow, it had covered up all the landmarks—but no! There was the young poplar, grown so much in these three years, no longer a baby, but a stripling, but she knew it all the same! ... Vaska grasped the cold handle and climbed down to the bottom step. A snowdrift swept up, and with a squeal Vaska jumped down into it.

She lay where she was until all the coaches had passed her, then rose, brushed off the snow, tidied her shawl and ran to the embankment to see where the way to the collective farm lay through the snow.

She had jumped from the train because it had suddenly flashed into her mind that maybe her relations on the collective farm might know something of Dad. Maybe he'd sent a letter, been asking where Vaska and Granny were and they hadn't known.

Wouldn't it be grand to tell them all how she'd stopped the bleeding on that amputation case!

Vaska was missed at once—Sukhoyedov had seen somebody fall from the general coach five kilometres from Sagaidak, the roll was called and it was found that Vaska was missing.

"She told me that her village was here," said Lena.

"That's what you get for taking on children," said Danilov in disgust, but Julia Dmitriyevna thought: "As long as she wasn't killed!"

The train stopped in Yereski for nearly two hours—Danilov purposely dragged out the halt, expecting Vaska to come. "She'll return," he thought, and at the end of the second hour she appeared, smelling of apples and snow.

"Well?" said Danilov. "Been home?"

"Yes, I been home," she said, smiling gaily. He had not the heart to scold her.

"Everything all right?" he asked.

"All right, they're alive," Vaska chattered away, untying her shawl. "They're living in a dugout, but not so bad ... gave me some apples. There's been a letter from Dad, he sends his love, he's been with the partisans ..."

Lena liked to watch the tortures of Nizvetsky. At times he would give up passing through her coach, at others would hurry backwards and forwards the whole day. Either he never looked her way, or she kept catching his sad and frightened gaze. ... On the whole it was all as she had wanted it. She went on quietly doing her work.

One day, after a loaded trip, she had tidied up her coach before everybody else. Feeling free, she went to the staff coach, took a chemise and a pair of stockings from her case and mended them. Then she wrote another letter. It was hard to write—all the words had been repeated and uttered many a time. What she could not write about, could not express, was the warmth of her heart. She took off her shoes, lay down on the bed, and took up a volume of Lermontov's poems which she had found in the train library.

"They loved each other so gently, so long. And then came death and they met again, but in this new life they did not recognize each other."

Then they can't have loved each other, that's all.

The three old men, Sukhoyedov, Kostritsyn and Protassov on the other side of the partition were having a leisurely gossip, sitting side by side, as though on their porch at home. Nizvetsky, his face parchment-yellow from his illness, his eyes dark and sunken, lay on the seat opposite them.

"Now take me," rumbled Protassov. "Joints swollen, see, and fingers in knots. And the veins. Look at these veins, life's not worth living with them."

"Why not?" asked Sukhoyedov. "You can live with

them all right. Sclerosis, that's what you expect with age. Drink iodine instead of vodka, and you'll live to be a hundred."

"No," sighed Protassov. "Our labours'll be over as soon as things begin to get in order again after the war. I'll retire on a pension, and that'll be the end of it."

"It's all right for you," sighed Kostritsyn. "Both your sons are all right, you'll end your days in peace as a granddad. But mine came home without an arm, and there's four children, all got to be brought up."

Nizvetsky groaned softly.

"A rotten illness," said Kostritsyn. "A bitch of an illness—worse than bombs. ..."

Lena was fortune-telling with a book of Lermontov's poems, opening the book and putting her finger on a verse with her eyes shut.

"Why should we seek your dreams to know?"

'Tis not for that we see you here."

Nothing suitable there.

The second time she got:

"Forget?—But God gave no forgetting.

Yes, and forgetting he'd reject."

Very far indeed from what she wanted.

The train arrived in B., and Lena went out on to the platform to post a letter and get some fresh air. She was still writing to the address that her husband had given her at the beginning of the war.

The station had been wrecked, the buildings stood without roofs or windows, skeleton buildings. Everything was grey and cheerless; it was neither winter nor autumn, an unpleasant drizzle filled the air and underfoot the ground was a thick, sticky paste. ...

Lena strode on, hands in greatcoat pockets, her cap pushed on to the back of her head.

A troop train had arrived, and the soldiers were spilling out of the coaches on to the platform. "Coming with us, kid?" a broad-shouldered, red-cheeked soldier called to Lena in passing. She smiled at him, and his

white teeth flashed in an answering smile as he ran past without stopping. ...

"Danya!"

He was walking in the stream of uniforms and at first did not hear her—she was a long way away, but she had recognized him. How? She had never seen him in an army greatcoat and cap with earflaps. His face had darkened, coarsened, his walk was like that of hundreds of others with him, but nevertheless she recognized him the moment her eye fell upon him.

"Danya, Danya. ..."

She laughed quietly from happiness. He came to her, she stretched out her hands. ... He took them, pressed them. She felt awkward about kissing him with so many people about. ... Was it possible that she had come to feel strange with him? She took his head in her hands and kissed him.

"You here?" he said.

"Yes," she said faintly, gazing radiantly, intimately into his eyes. "You're alive."

"I'm alive," he replied. "And it's a pretty good piece of luck, considering all the tight spots I've been in. ... You a sergeant," and he nodded at her epaulettes. "Not bad. ..."

"That's my train," she said.

"Yes?" he said. "And we're going to Warsaw. Going to take it. How are you getting along? You've got thinner. ..."

"Danya," she said, "I don't want to talk. I just want to look at you and listen to you. ... Look at me. Why didn't you write?"

"Didn't write?" he said. "I've written. It probably never reached you." He fell silent, looking at her with a shade of worry. "Think of meeting like this, Lenchka. ..."

"You're alive!" she said, stroking his face. He moved it away slightly.

"Don't, Lenchka. ..."

She noticed nothing, happiness made her blind.

"I'm laughing, do you know why? I don't. ... Dearest, look, they've all gone, is it time already?"

"Yes, now," he mumbled and began walking towards the train, Lena by his side. "A shame, didn't have time to get any hot water. We've got a stove, but it's easier to get it at stations. ..."

"I'd only just posted a letter to you," she said, her eyes fixed on his face. "It would have been better if I'd given it to you. Do you get my letters?"

"No," he said. "That is, of course I do. Just now I don't even know what address will reach me. ..."

They were standing beside the van. Two officers were standing in the doorway, smoking and looking down at them.

"I love you!" Lena said loudly, embracing him and reaching up to kiss him.

"Lena!" he said. "I don't want to deceive you." He took her by the elbows, and pressed them apologetically. "Forgive me. It just happened, you know. ..."

She stared at him. She could not understand what he meant. What did he mean about deceiving? What was she to forgive?

"It happened," he continued in a low voice. "It must have been fated so. ... The stars. ..." He smiled awkwardly. "I met a woman. Don't be angry with me, Lenochka, these things happen without our wanting it, you know. ... War, it divides some and joins others. ... Of course, you keep the room and everything," he added hastily, frowning in distaste.

What things? Why should she keep the room? Was he thinking that he was going to be killed? ...

"Forgive me," he said, dropping his eyes before hers.

Understanding came to her, and suddenly her shoulders sagged.

He continued to speak, stammering.

"I've often thought—why did it have to happen that way? I don't know. Maybe we found each other too quickly, too suddenly. It was like a fever. And when we parted, it passed. ..."

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"It hasn't passed with me," she said through grey lips. He did not hear the words, but he guessed their meaning—from her eyes, the movement of her head.

"You were able to preserve it. ..."

She turned and left him.

Thrusting her hands into her pockets she walked with slow, heavy steps, unlike her own. She felt exhausted. Love, which had given her strength, beauty and joy, now lay heavy upon her like a cross, a cross which she would have to bear until she found the strength to cast it from her.

CHAPTER XII

DANILOV

DANILOV was no great lover of nature—it would be more correct to say that he had never thought much about it. He had grown up among fields and forests and had never noticed their beauty. He would look at the clouds, the sun, the meadows, and think: "The hay'll be good this year." He would look at the forest and think: "That would make good building material!" It was people, their affairs and their relations that filled his mind.

But on the way to Warsaw even he could not fail to note the beauty of the forest. On either side of the track rose tall, straight fir trees, each one with its majestic crown as though they had been specially selected; and all laden with newly fallen snow, which blanketed their broad fans, and lodged in puffs between them. "Like fairyland," thought Danilov, as he stood on the platform screwing his eyes to protect them from the glare of that silvery whiteness flowing smoothly, silently, majestically past, lovely and unsoiled. ... As the sun sank, it cast a rosy glow over the whiteness, the rose deepened, then disappeared, and soft blue shadow enveloped the forest, like a blessing bringing peace. ... The train stopped.

They had been halted by a small column of soldiers—Russians and Poles—commanded by a youthful junior lieutenant. Snow had packed on their felt boots to the knees and shaken down on to their caps and shoulders. They came from the depths of that fairy-like forest and were going to clean out some of the gangs swarming around Warsaw. The junior lieutenant wanted a lift.

"It's domestic business, so to speak," said the lieutenant. "The Germans have all made off, and left these gangs of bandits with machine guns—they took the big guns with them. The last of these bands in the Chervonny Forest were settled only yesterday."

The train was going to Chervonny Forest.

The column was accommodated in the general coach and given hot tea. They left at the third station.

Late that evening, in the heart of the forest, the train loaded up with wounded. The hospital was situated in a lonely, four-storey building built in a severe formal style, without any outbuildings. Ambulances came in from the forest, headlights blazing, bringing in wounded. The loading went swiftly, and within three hours the train had started on its return journey. They were not far from the front, and the men were not long from the battlefield.

"Do you know," Dr Belov told Danilov, "in coach six there are two women, officers. One has her leg amputated at the hip. It was a terrible pity, but we had to put them in a hard coach, there was absolutely no room in the Krieger."

There was no room in the Krieger, because they had an exceptional number of serious cases; even the isolation compartment was filled.

On his morning rounds, Danilov glanced in at the women. They were in the end compartment, and in accordance with Dr Belov's instructions a sheet had been hung to screen it. Danilov glanced in cautiously. The women were asleep; one of them was lying almost on her face, which was buried in the pillow, the back of her head with its short fair fluffy hair shaking with the movement of the train; the other one had pulled the sheet up almost to her nose, her forehead was lined, her hair grey, with strands of coal-black, her eyelids large and very dark. There was such weariness and grief on these heavy eyelids that Danilov went away on tiptoe and told Vaska who was on duty, in a whisper:

"You've got women here—don't bother them, let them sleep. Look in pretty often, but don't disturb them. I know you—as soon as it gets light you start pushing thermometers into people. ..."

Vaska stood in healthy awe of Danilov. She immediately sought out Sister Smirnova and told her:

"Captain Danilov's been here, said not to disturb the women, let them sleep."

She told Sister Faïna the same.

Neither Smirnova nor Faïna had time to bother with sleeping women—they were run off their feet. It was a particularly difficult trip. All morning people had their hands full, and nobody appeared in the staff coach for dinner except Suprugov.

"I'm accustomed to order in my life," he said. "A correct régime is a guarantee for good work."

He took off his overall, washed his hands and sat down with pleasurable anticipation at the table where dinner was already served on the plates with snowy napkins beside them. Sobol came in.

"Where are they all, do tell me," he asked. "The food is growing cold and I can't go on warming it up."

"They'll come," replied Suprugov, unfolding his napkin—"Ah, what do I see?"

"Yes," Sobol sighed deeply, "On loaded trips we eat like we would have prayed God to eat in 1940."

Dinner was interrupted by a knock at the door—a loud, intrusive knock. It was Smirnova.

"Doctor," she gasped in a voice quite unlike her own. "Come to coach six at once."

"What's the matter?" asked Suprugov. He had just speared a piece of roast pork with his fork, smeared it with mustard and crowned it with a ring of onions.

"The wounded woman's in labour," said Smirnova.

Suprugov did not understand.

"How do you mean, in labour?"

"The usual way, that's how," Smirnova replied coarsely. The sight of that piece of meat on the fork which Suprugov was holding vertically in front of him, motionless, got on her nerves. She would have liked to push the plate away from under his nose. ... Smirnova was young and quick-tempered, and all her simple, natural feeling mirrored itself in her angry grey eyes. ...

"The train's shaken her up, and now she's in labour," she explained. "The one with a leg off."

Suprugov carried the pork to his mouth and followed it with a piece of bread. Tears filled his eyes ... from the mustard.

"But see here," he said, when he had finished chewing. "There wasn't anything about pregnancy in the case-book?"

"Nothing."

"And the matron—is she there?"

"The matron's in coach nine, with a man who's in a fit. They're all there."

"And Olga Mikhailovna?"

"In the Krieger coach, doing dressings."

Suprugov pondered. It was always like that—if something happened, they were all busy. But what had it to do with him? He was no obstetrician. Ear, nose, throat ... It wasn't his job to be a midwife.

"Why get into a panic?" asked Suprugov. "You women ought to know what to do in such cases."

And noting with satisfaction that Smirnova reddened, and her eyes expressed very plainly her longing to hit him, he rose and added:

"Go along, I'll be there in a moment."

But when he arrived in coach six, after washing his hands and putting on his overall, he found Olga Mikhailovna and Julia Dmitriyevna, whom Vaska had called, already busy there. With mingled curiosity and distaste Suprugov glanced at the woman in labour. Her large body with mountainous stomach, covered with a sheet, jerked convulsively. Her grey head with black strands of hair rolled from side to side on the pillow.

"Scream, dear, scream!" Olga Mikhailovna was telling her swiftly and tenderly. "Don't worry about making a noise, it'll be easier for you."

But the woman made no sound. Beads of sweat rolled down on to the pillow beside her head, her bitten lips were swollen. A prolonged groan burst from her, like the strangled lowing of a cow, and her eyes in their dark sockets stared haunted from her haggard face.

"Scream just once, a good hard scream!" Olga Mikhailovna urged her. Julia Dmitriyevna saw Suprugov and went to him.

"You're not at all necessary here," she said, confused as a girl. "We can manage without you."

He looked at her and a frivolous thought made him half-close his eyes. Surely, all this had a meaning—the lowered eyes, the quick, clumsy movement, which she made when she saw him. ... So that's what it was. It is true he'd been vaguely aware of it for some time. Funny, very funny.

"One thing amazes me," Suprugov said sternly, "the fact that there is no word about pregnancy in the case-history."

"What if there *had* been," replied Julia Dmitriyevna. "We wouldn't have been able in any case to prevent what happened."

"It is a crime," said Suprugov, "a crime to evacuate a person in this condition."

"You forget that one couldn't have left her in the front line. This is a premature birth. She had another two months to go."

Julia Dmitriyevna had mastered her discomfiture and spoke with her usual self-assurance, but still did not look into Suprugov's eyes. Doctor Belov came running. In the ninth carriage a man with concussion had just been having a bad fit and the doctor now hurried to the new patient. Did it really have to be this unfortunate woman whose leg was amputated up to the hip? ...

"Well?" Dr Belov asked, looking imploringly from Julia Dmitriyevna to Suprugov: "How is she?"

"Not so bad, she's got a strong constitution. If she were able to have normal labour it would all have gone quicker. But she can't because of her one leg." This came from Julia Dmitriyevna. Suprugov pulled a sad face and uttered a sigh. Dr Belov, greatly moved, felt a wave of gratitude to Suprugov.

"What a good thing you are here, old man. Have you sounded her heart?"

Suprugov was taken aback. Julia Dmitriyevna came to his help.

"I'm watching the heart. It's all right. If she were able to press with both legs the child would already have been born."

A cry sounded from behind the sheet, a cry that shrilled through the nerves of all the men in the coach. The grey-haired woman had screamed at last.

A feeble, seven-months' boy was born, and at the first station a telegram was sent to the evacuation point at M. requesting them to send a car to meet the train and take off mother and child.

Danilov heard about all this in passing, without paying much attention to it. His mind was filled with the man in coach nine. Like everything which went beyond well-defined limits, everything hard to understand, this man's sickness irritated Danilov. Wounds, infection, gangrene, all the destruction which metal and microbes can bring to the human body—to all this, Danilov was accustomed. But the man who had given him all that trouble this morning for a solid two hours was not wounded. Blast from a shell had hurled him from his feet, he had not even been very much bruised, he had not lost a drop of blood, only consciousness, and that not for long. And suddenly—these fits began. It was as though some evil power had taken possession of him—his body would arch and jerk as though there were a spring in it, he would beat the back of his head on the floor, while white foam flecked his lips. And this was a man who had never previously suffered from epilepsy, his nerves had been in order, his parents and grandparents had enjoyed perfect health. It was incomprehensible. Danilov found the doctors' explanations confused and vague. If he had read of such a case, he would not have believed it, would have thought there must be something fishy somewhere. But he had seen the fit with his own eyes, he himself had talked with the man, had held his head during one of those fits and had felt the evil strength that had convulsed the body on the

bed until four strong men could barely hold him down. Yes, it was real enough, but it should not be, there should be nothing dark, senseless and evil to torture men.

Danilov returned to the staff coach at the end of the day. He refused any dinner, he was not hungry, only tired and upset. He rolled himself a cigarette and lit up, felt his agitation dying away, and his thoughts clearing. Science would learn how to deal with this foul illness too, all in good time, just as it had learned to treat tuberculosis, syphilis and gangrene. After all, there were other people in a worse plight than this shock case. If he had been given the chance to change places with that woman who had lost a leg and given birth on the way, he would probably have thought about it—and refused. ... And as he recalled the woman, Danilov decided to visit her.

She was lying there, covered with a quilt, shivering with cold although it was warm in the coach. The child was not there—it had been taken to the isolation compartment.

"How do you feel?" Danilov asked her. Her face was in the shadow of the upper shelf, only her eyes gleamed. The lights had not yet been turned on.

"All right."

The voice was husky, cracked. Danilov seated himself on the corner of the bed opposite her by the feet of the short-haired blonde who was rolling a cigarette with great concentration, gathering up the tobacco crumbs from the quilt with slender, roughened fingers.

"Isn't it bad for you, smoking in here?" Danilov asked in disapproval, turning to the woman who had had the child. Her large mouth curved in a smile, and the fair-haired woman said in an exasperated tone:

"I'm making it for her. She smokes all day long, and makes me roll them for her. ... Here!" she added angrily, holding out the cigarette to the other woman.

"I'll smoke it later on," she said, and laid the cigarette on the table, while the blonde immediately started rolling a fresh one. The woman who had given birth

evidently felt cold—she pulled the quilt up over her face nearly to the eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked, never taking her glowing eyes from Danilov's face. "Are you a doctor?"

He told her.

"Have you been here long?"

"Since the beginning of the war."

"And what were you before the war?"

It seemed that she was asking him questions, instead of the other way about. But it was better that way, easier to start a conversation. He answered her briefly, and then asked:

"And what was your job?"

"I?" she replied after a slight pause, shortly, curtly. "I worked in the Soviet administration."

"And your husband?"

"Killed at the front."

She evidently did not want to talk about herself and this disappointed him.

"It'll be difficult for you with the child," he said bluntly. He had come to comfort her, give her hope, tell her that even with the child, even without a leg, she wouldn't go under, and this was how she behaved—curt, prickly, asking him all about himself, and then erecting a barrier between them, as though she would say: What has it got to do with you?

"Yes," she agreed. "It'll be difficult."

"Have you any relatives?"

"Yes."

"They'll help. ..."

She jerked out a short laugh.

"They'll help me if I go on my knees to them. ..."

Her laugh told him plainly that she had no intention of going on her knees to her relations. He pictured her going along the street when she was discharged from hospital. It would not be possible to fit her with an artificial leg, the amputation was too high, she would have to go on crutches to the end of her life. She could not carry the child, somebody else would have to do that.

He pictured it vividly, but he could no longer feel the pity that had brought him here. What he felt now was a deep respect for this woman and the hard lot awaiting her. Pity is too small a thing for such a destiny.

He wanted to ask her where she came from, whether she had other children, was she a member of the Communist Party, but she suddenly said in a dry, weary voice:

"Would you be so kind as to call Sister."

He realized that she did not want to talk, and rose and went out. He heard her say to the blonde woman:

"Now I want that cigarette, Varyushka, Oh how I want it!"

That night he dreamed of her—she was walking along the street on crutches, tall, grey-headed, unapproachable, and somebody followed her carrying the baby. Even in his dream he did not recognize her.

He recognized her only in the morning, at the station of M. An ambulance was waiting by the line, and two orderlies carried her out on a stretcher with her child. Danilov watched through the window of the staff coach. The woman's big arm was round the muffled shape of the infant, and her face, turned towards it, held care and pain. And in the clear light of the winter morning Danilov recognized that face, knew it through the mask which time and suffering had laid upon it, through lines and shadows, that one and only dear face with the small, white, star-shaped scar on the cheekbone. ...

"Ah, knight, Faïna was her name," somebody seemed to shout into his ear with Sobol's voice. The stretcher disappeared into the ambulance. The car started and so did the train. Danilov stood by the window. He had not yet faced up to anything. He had merely recognized a fact.

"Ah, knight, Faïna was her name!" Sobol's voice dinned into his ear. "Ah, knight, Faïna was her name," the wheels clattered, increasing in speed and anger.

So that was how they met.

They had met and he had not known her, had sat

there beside her as though she were a stranger and talked with her across the barrier which she had set up. But she must have known him at once. The more he thought about it, the more certain he became that she had recognized him. With what earnest intentness she had regarded him, had asked who he was and what he had been doing before the war. She had wanted to know what he had become, her pupil who had left his everlasting mark upon her face.

She had not wanted to tell him anything about herself. ...

What relief, almost joy had been in her voice when she had said: "Now I want that cigarette, Varyuskha. ..."

She had not smoked it when he was there lest the match should illuminate her face. And she had got rid of him quickly before he found out. She had been afraid that he might recognize her by the tone of her voice.

He had not recognized her, he had never guessed.

How could he?

Almost a quarter of a century had passed. There was as little likeness between that stern, grey-haired woman and the former Faïna as there was between Danilov and the boy for whose actions Danilov was not responsible.

That lad with the down on his upper lip and the laughing Faïna with hanging wet hair ... those were dear figures which had been left at the threshold of life. Danilov felt no more of that craving, that tenderness. Or did he? A quarter of a century. ... How many days and nights, how many thoughts, how many tasks. Grey hairs on his temples. ... Could a lad long for his own home, for his own corner? Danilov had.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EVE OF PEACE

FAÏNA had long ago noticed that Nizvetsky was in love with Lena. She felt these things with a sort of sixth sense. Lena's set, mocking, hard face made her indignant.

"What cheek!" she thought. "This chit of a girl thinks she can play with people merely because she is young and pretty."

One evening, going from the dispensary to the staff coach, she bumped against Nizvetsky. He was mending the lighting in the officers' coach. Faïna banged the door against him and said:

"Ah! It's you!" He drew away in silence. He always timidly made way for everyone. Faïna stopped:

"There was something I wanted to say to you, Comrade Nizvetsky ... Ah, yes, can you repair my table-lamp?"

"Yes, I can," said Nizvetsky.

"To-day?" asked Faïna, "Straight away?"

"Yes, if you like," Nizvetsky answered in his low, sad voice, "After I've seen to this lighting."

Faïna had no settled plan of action, she had called Nizvetsky on an impulse. She went back to her compartment singing: "Don't ask me any questions:" put some biscuits into a saucer and boiled some water. Half an hour later Nizvetsky arrived with a piece of wire in his hand. He had the air of a man who has no cause to be pleased with life. Faïna said:

"Ah! The lamp. It hasn't been working for a long time, I've pushed it under the sofa somewhere. Let's have tea first, I'm dying for it." (It was impossible to confess that the lamp was in perfect order.)

Nizvetsky was confused. It was clean in the compartment, snow-white embroidered pillows lay on the blue covers. By the mirror stood a line of elephants from

the tiniest to a big one—like a diagram. Nizvetsky counted thirteen of them. He sat clumsily on the edge of the sofa, ashamed at being badly dressed. Had he known, he'd have put on his new suit.

"Maybe I'll come later," he murmured.

"Heavens, no!" said Faïna, putting some jam into his saucer—"Sit quietly, don't keep jumping up. Let me do my duty as a hostess."

Nizvetsky left Faïna, his ears slightly singing, his stomach full and his heart softened by the feminine charm which Faïna had poured out to him.

"She is a nice girl," he thought, remembering her jam, her good-humoured chatter and ringing laughter. He didn't think she was flirting with him, he was merely grateful to her. After her compartment, filled with scent and vanilla, the staff train seemed stuffy and not cosy. Passing by the place where Lena slept he peered behind. Lena was not there. She was probably still in the Krieger—but he felt no desire to go there now. He had had no opportunity to mend the lamp. Towards the end of their tea, he had remembered the reason of his coming. But Faïna said she wanted to sleep and asked him to come the next evening—why, she *had* to have her lamp mended, she was helpless without it.

It was the middle of April 1945, the last battles were in progress near Berlin, and the hospital train went to Omsk for its yearly overhaul.

Dr Belov received a telegram granting leave to some of the personnel. He came out of his compartment, beaming until every wrinkle was like a ray of sunshine, holding the telegram above his head.

"This concerns you, too," he told Julia Dmitriyevna, who was the first person he met. "Only you've all got to beg on your hind legs for it—all of you named here."

But without waiting for anybody to beg he began reading the telegram. The people given leave included Suprugov, Julia Dmitriyevna, Kravtsov and Lena Ogorodnikova.

To his great disappointment the doctor found that some of the people given leave did not greet the news with any particular pleasure. Klava Mukhina asked him:

"How can we both go—Julia Dmitriyevna and I? Who'll look after the surgery?"

Lena declined point blank to go on leave, said that she did not want to go, and asked that Nadya be released in her place—and the doctor had been thinking that Lena would rejoice more than anybody else at the prospect of a holiday, she had been looking so tired and ill recently. ...

Julia Dmitriyevna on learning that she had leave reddened even more than usual then suddenly paled and pressed her lips together with an expression of gloomy anxiety. This leave would decide her fate. She would be travelling with Suprugov.

After all, he had described his flat to her, had even drawn a plan of it; she had hidden that plan away, and sometimes took it out to look at it. ... Once he had said "Goodnight" to her so tenderly, and kissed her hand. ...

And when he learned about leave, he said to her: "Of course we'll travel together?"

For the first time in her life, the crazy hope possessed her that it would be like this:

(Of course, she was not particularly young, she would soon be forty-four; but she had excellent health and looked much younger than her years, she had not a single grey hair and very few lines in her face. And after all, he wasn't a boy either, say what you would! And she wasn't good looking, but there were plenty of plain women in the world who were loved and cherished. She knew one who had been married four times. One very handsome doctor had almost shot himself because of her, had been restrained only with difficulty.)

This was how it would be: they would arrive in their home town together, and he would say to her. ... No, he would say it on the way, everything ought to be settled before they arrived. "My dear," he would say, "I can't

live without you, be my wife." Perhaps he would add: "My companion through life," or "my dearest friend," or something like that. Or perhaps he would add nothing, since all was contained in that one beautiful moving word: wife. How happy were those women who were somebody's wife, or who had at some time been somebody's wife, how beautiful was a woman's life when she had children. ...

Children! She passed her hands shyly over her breasts and abdomen. She would have had strong, fine children; she was made to be a mother and she knew it.

He would propose to her on the way and they would go straight from the station to his flat. He would take her home. ... It would be a strange place to her, she would have to get used to it and learn to be at home there, and settle down with the neighbours, but what of it? A wife's home is with her husband.

The first day she would take him to see her family. They would arrive arm in arm, an affectionate married couple. How glad Father and Mother would be, they had probably given up all hope of her ever marrying, and there she would suddenly arrive arm-in-arm with her husband. ...

There were moments when she felt so sure of it all that she wanted to send a telegram home: "Coming home on leave with my husband, Julia." Then suddenly her faith in the possibility of happiness would evaporate, her spirits would fall and she would feel weak all over ... a physical powerlessness, almost nausea.

"It can't happen," she thought. "Nothing like that can happen to me."

But she would see Suprugov, hear the special, significant note in his voice, catch his glance, also with a special significance in it, and his smile directed at her—and again the wave of hope would catch her up and sweep her away. ...

She was so weary with alternate hope and depression, that sometimes she longed to go to him and ask straight out—yes, or no? But she was restrained by womanly

pride, womanly shame and yet one more feeling, stronger than even pride or shame—the fear of complete loss of all hope.

She could not renounce her dreams. This was her first real feminine expectation, the first—and the last. She was forty-four. Soon she would be old. Life was passing. If Suprugov went, she would have no more hope of marriage, motherhood, of that normal life which millions of women live, taking it as a matter of course.

Suprugov said to Danilov very affably:

"How is it that you haven't been given any leave, Ivan Egorich, it's a shame, isn't it?"

He was very pleased that while Danilov had been omitted from the list, he, Suprugov, was on it. Now he was sure he would get a decoration; the train was praised everywhere, the papers wrote about it, they asked for a description of it for the All-Union exhibition, and had not he, Suprugov, been the first to write about it while it was still ignored by the central authorities. Unfortunately, Danilov would probably get a decoration too—concerned as he was with political affairs, to be sure. But they hadn't given him any leave, while he, Suprugov, had got it. ... Danilov did not explain to Suprugov that he was not going to take any leave until the end of the war and that Dr Belov and himself had composed the list for those to go on leave. He said, casually:

"In a week or so I'm going for party matters to V."

He was worrying about Kravtsov. Kravtsov would have first to get his leave and he would go when he returned; one of the two had to be here to watch the repair works; nobody else could be trusted with the job, neither the chief, nor Sobol, nor Protassov.

"And what about the oscillator?" he asked Kravtsov. "Will you have time to repair it?"

"You ought to know me well enough," replied Kravtsov.

"And you'll come back on time?"

"Now, that's enough, comrade," said Kravtsov, "I'm fed up with these jokes. My leave is due long ago."

Where would you find another fool to do hard labour of his own free will?"

Danilov arranged a special celebration to see Kravtsov off. The unit stood to attention and he was presented with official gratitude and a bonus: material for a suit and a watch.

"I'll be going home with presents!" said Kravtsov, coming back to the station. "The material will do as a dress for my old lady, and my son will get my old watch, it's better than any new one."

Vaska and fat Iya were going to V. too—they were being sent on a nursing course. Danilov sent for them for a few final words.

"You know there are all sorts of foolish people, and worse, who spread tales about nurses. Don't take any notice of them, but behave so that nobody can pick any holes anywhere. Remember—neatness and propriety in your clothes, your walk, your voice, everything. So that people will point to you as an example of how to behave. And no more of that foolishness," he added, pointing to Vaska's face.

"What can I do!" said Vaska, "if there's a six months' guarantee?"

"But somehow, it seems to me," said Danilov, "that I've seen you with those eyebrows for over a year."

"But what can I do?" said Vaska. "Hang myself, or what? I've tried to get them off with bichloride and paraffin, but nothing helps."

None of which was true—actually she had returned twice to the hairdresser to have her brows blackened. ...

Danilov told Sobol to give the girls a good supply of food to take with them, and in the highest spirits, using medicament boxes for suitcases, they changed on to a goods train going to Leningrad.

Julia Dmitriyevna and Suprugov left two days later.

"My dear," said Faïna, as she said her goodbye, "I wish you all the best, everything! You can't imagine how I want it!"

Beaming, she opened her arms wide and embraced and kissed Julia Dmitriyevna, who felt confused, and pecked at Faïna awkwardly with her hard lips. ...

She took her place with Suprugov in a second class compartment in an express; they would be travelling together for thirty-six hours.

If Julia Dmitriyevna's feelings had not been in such a state of chaos the passenger compartment would have struck her as being very dirty and neglected after her own snowy hospital surroundings; the seats were dusty, the electric light was dim, the netting of the luggage rack was in holes, and feathers were coming out of the thin pillows which the conductor brought them. But fastidious and orderly as she was, this time it was a matter of indifference to her.

It was evening when they left. Suprugov immediately began to prepare for the night and after making a few remarks to Julia Dmitriyevna fell peacefully asleep. She also lay down, but sleep was far from her. Never before had she been so close to a man whom she loved—only the tiny table separated them. On the upper berths some unknown men were sleeping—army men to judge by the boots standing on the floor.

She lay wakeful, staring upwards, shaking with the vibration of the train, thinking how many men there were in the country, young and old, sick and healthy, and not one among them all who had wanted to share with her his man's life, his man's heart. Suprugov lay with his back to her, she could see his neatly clipped nape and the sleeve of his striped shirt lying on the blanket, and suddenly she realized that he was for ever remote from her, that it was all dreams, mirage, woman's foolishness. She felt so unhappy that she longed to cry, but that was something she did not know how to do.

In the morning he rose unconcernedly, calmly ignorant of the fact that she had spent a wakeful night on his account. He offered her eau-de-cologne when he went to wash, prepared sandwiches for her, and talked with her so politely, so respectfully, that she glowed

again. The officers looked down at them from their upper berths, sending clouds of strong tobacco smoke to the ceiling, and Julia Dmitriyevna found it very pleasant. Nevertheless, she was glad when a young lieutenant-colonel came in and took them both away for a game of Preference and she was left alone with Suprugov.

He showed some confusion, complained of stuffiness and opened the door into the corridor. "How noble he is," thought Julia Dmitriyevna. "He's afraid of compromising me."

"We're running on time?" she asked to fill up an awkward silence.

"Yes," he replied. "We shall be in V. at six tomorrow morning." He glanced at his watch. "We still have eighteen hours to go."

"Another eighteen hours of suspense," she thought. She wished the train would be late, wanted it to go on running for a long, long time so that she could be the longer with him and her hopes.

"Shall we have something to eat?" Suprugov suggested.

She agreed, although she was not in the least hungry. Again he got out the box of provisions and again politely and expertly prepared sandwiches for her. She ate languidly, thinking: we'll go on eating and eating, and then our companions will return, then it'll be night, we'll arrive home, and everything will be at an end.

"Shall we sleep for a little?" Suprugov said when they had finished eating. "There's no better time to rest than on a journey, isn't that right?"

He lay down and quickly fell asleep, or else pretended to sleep, while she sat there saying farewell to her hopes.

How ugly her red hands were with their yellow nails. Down had seeped out from the pillow, it was all over her skirt. The humdrum daily round of an old maid's life, not needed by anybody. ... Probably those officers had been laughing up their sleeve as they watched Suprugov taking care of her. Oh, what a fool, it served her right. ...

Some people glanced in at the open door. She was

afraid that they might see the suffering in her face and tried to assume a calm, indifferent expression. But the people who glanced into the compartment only thought: "How tired that woman with the lieutenant's epaulettes looks."

In the morning Julia Dmitriyevna and Suprugov said goodbye on the platform.

"Are you taking the tram?" he asked.

"No," she replied. "I shall walk, it's not far."

"Shall I get you a porter?"

"No, thanks. I can manage myself."

Her voice was firm and commanding, and as he looked at her he thought: "The woman miscalculated. But she hides it well."

She was the first to say goodbye, but her voice suddenly broke, and there was almost a sob in it.

"Au revoir, my dear," he corrected her gently. "We'll soon be meeting again in the hospital train."

He kissed her hand, she snatched it away quickly and awkwardly and walked swiftly along the station platform, broad and clumsy, her heavy suitcase in her hand.

After having breakfast that morning in the train, he had reckoned up the remaining food, carefully divided it into two equal portions and put some tins and packages into Julia Dmitriyevna's suitcase. There was something so humiliating in his dividing the tins and the bacon that her throat contracted at the memory of it.

Pale and gloomy, her lips pressed tightly together, she went through the crowded station square.

"Julia Dmitriyevna! Julia Dmitriyevna!" came a desperate call from behind her. She looked round—Vaska was flying after her in her army tunic and coal-black brows from nose to temple.

"Vaska," said Julia Dmitriyevna, taken aback, "what's the matter, Vaska?"

"Oh, goodness, I've been coming here every morn to meet you. Oh what a good thing I didn't miss you!"

"Not morn, morning," Julia Dmitriyevna corrected her mechanically.

"Well, morning, then," Vaska agreed. "Julia Dmitriyevna, we've started learning, we began yesterday. Iya and me. And Julia Dmitriyevna, everybody's amazed that we're so cultured and know so much, and I know more than any of them, really I do."

"Where's Iya?" asked Julia Dmitriyevna.

"At the hostel. She's still asleep. We were all of us at the pictures yesterday, all the course, eh, how we did cry. ... Give me your bag, Julia Dmitriyevna." And Vaska swiftly seized the suitcase.

"Come with me, Vaska." The girl's presence seemed to make Julia Dmitriyevna feel a little better. "Come along home with me."

She walked along without heeding Vaska's chatter. They came to the clean, quiet street with its parallel lines of poplars—one of the oldest and most dignified streets in the town. Every poplar, every paving stone on that street was familiar to Julia Dmitriyevna from childhood. ...

"Shall we get to your house soon?" asked Vaska.

"Very soon now," Julia Dmitriyevna replied. "Just round that corner."

A woman carrying a milk-can stood at the corner, looking about her.

"Where does the doctor's assistant live?" she asked, as they drew up level with her. Julia Dmitriyevna smiled. The woman with the can seeking the doctor's assistant was like the threshold to her home.

A heavy bolt scraped, the door opened, and old arms reached out from the falling sleeves of a dressing gown.

"My dear! My dear! I saw from the window—our heroine's coming, our lovely girl's coming. ... Just imagine, only yesterday Professor Skuderevsky was asking after you. ... Mitya! Mitya! Get up, our girl's come. Julinka's here. ..."

Returning home Kravtsov learned from his "old lady" that his son Sereja had been appointed assistant engine-driver on the same Diesel-train on which Kravtsov had

worked before the war. Sereja was only seventeen and his mother was very proud of his appointment.

"Nothing wonderful about it," said Kravtsov, "I've had to do with engines since I was fifteen."

Having shaved and put on a Sunday suit he went to the factory. With an air of superiority and condescension he got acquainted with the new trade-union manager—a woman.

A woman! What could she know about electricity. ...

Then he went to the Diesel. Sereja was busy. He smiled broadly when he saw his father and shouted:

"I'll be with you in a moment, wait!"

Kravtsov sat on the window-sill and watched Sereja dealing with the machinery. The gum boots were too high for Sereja—he was of small stature.

"It's the same as with transport," thought Kravtsov, "While we're away it's the women and the children who do the jobs."

He had a talk with his old friend the engine-driver, a steady chap, gave him some Ukrainian honey apples, and invited him to call in the evening. The shift soon came to an end and Kravtsov and Sereja went home. Sereja asked where his father had been and Kravtsov told him about Kiev, Brest, Tiflis.

"Well," he finished, "that's just geography," and he began to talk about the train.

"We—Danilov and I—do the whole thing. He gets the ideas—a wonderful head, his!—and I carry them out. The running work? Well, I am responsible for the electricity. Also the wireless. It's I who do the repairs on central heating. You have my word for it, they can't even solder a teapot without me."

He enjoyed being able to talk of everything with Sereja knowing that he'd understand.

"For sun-ray treatment I had to alter all the apparatus to 100 voltage. I had to replace Mione fuses by Swans."

In the meantime the "old lady" had done the round of neighbours and collected drink wherever she could

against coupons. It was considered indecent to welcome an army man on leave without drink and with someone like *her* old man, why, she wouldn't dream of it!

Kravtsov saw with joy the assortment of bottles on the table and asked complacently:

"Everything all right, mother?"

"Yes father," she replied.

"You're still able to set things on fire," he went on, "But where are the guests?"

They came: a few relations and old friends, among them the engine-driver, Sereja's boss. The atmosphere was gay without being riotous. They clinked glasses and complimented each other. All the affection and attention were concentrated on Kravtsov. He had to tell each new guest in turn about Kiev and Brest and the traces the Germans had left in the land. He finished with that part of his story as quickly as possible and returned to the train.

"It's all very hard. We get petrol of heavy quality when we ought to be getting diesel oil. There's nothing to do but work on the petrol. That makes soot, the rings get worn out. Think how often one has to take the thing apart for cleaning."

"Of course!" the old friends replied, tossing down sedately one glass after the other, "It's clear! With heavy petrol. ..."

"And what about Sereja?" Kravtsov asked the driver aloud, "How does he work? Doesn't give his father a bad name?"

The driver praised Sereja. Kravtsov, then and there, gave Sereja the watch and also the following instructions:

"Sereja, always remember to approach an engine when sober. The machine should be loved, then it will love you back. If you *do* love it, it will welcome you as soon as you open the door—for here is a beloved person coming. If you treat it casually, it'll take you into its grip, maul you, spit you out like a bit of flesh. Think of its bulk—two trucks to carry one engine. Yes, yes, with sobriety and love!" Kravtsov repeated, losing the thread

and trying to recapture it. "In work there should be beauty of execution and a sense of culture," he continued. "Electric work is the most progressive and scientific. ..." He went on and on, feeling that eloquence grew in him with every glass. The guests, well satisfied, had gone away, but he went on sermonising Sereja. He woke up next morning on the familiar bed. His first thought was: he'd overslept the shift! Then he remembered that he wasn't working in the factory, but that his job was still in the hospital train and that he was only on leave at the moment. So he calmed down and started to think: who could have dragged him on to the bed and when? He heard his "old lady" below cleaning the shoes.

"Where is Sereja?" he asked.

"At work," she replied.

Kravtsov threw back the blanket, lowered his feet to the ground.

"I see," he said, severely and ponderously. "Give me something for my hangover, mother."

Everything was now settled between Faïna and Nizvetsky. How it happened Nizvetsky himself didn't know. He went to see her, had tea, Faïna laughed, talked, fussed about the compartment, touching him now with her shoulder now with her knee. She asked him about his relations and wanted to know if there were many Chinese in Vladivostock. She spoke of his illness with great sympathy. "You shouldn't have an operation," she said, "without first consulting a homœopath." She had heard that they sometimes performed miracles with cases like his. Finally Nizvetsky mended her lamp, the lamp itself was in good order, but by this time the bulb had been burned out so Faïna could come back to his story. Faïna told Nizvetsky, that he was very attractive—surely all women were mad about him? Nizvetsky was surprised, but looking at himself in the mirror, found that he was, indeed, quite handsome, just a bit yellow, but that would pass when he got better, Faïna

was right. ... Filled with hope and affection, Nizvetsky was more and more reluctant to leave Faïna's compartment and the staff train. It was hard for him to go even an hour without seeing Faïna. He had long abandoned thinking about Lena. ... And one day, when Julia Dmitriyevna was on leave and Danilov had gone to town, it somehow so happened that he remained with Faïna till dawn. ...

"There is one thing I can't understand," he said to her, happy and content, "Why did you fall in love with me?" She held him in her arms, softly, like a baby.

"How is it you don't understand?" she said with tears in her eyes, deeply moved. He wanted her to explain it all in detail.

"Because you are modest," she enumerated with delight, "because you're polite, intelligent—in one word, wonderful. ..."

She really believed that these qualities of Nizvetsky's had long ago conquered her. She even believed that their meeting in the train carried the stamp of some mysterious premonition, that she, Faïna, had to go through the war, all the dangers and the work to find her happiness, the only happiness of her life.

"I only ask you one thing," she whispered hotly into his ear. "always remember my love. These chits of girls are ready to hang themselves on anyone's neck just out of sheer boredom. I alone will be your true friend, your real wife. My darling, it's awful, I feel I'll be madly jealous of you. ..."

One day Fima came to Danilov.

She had not been working in the staff coach for a long time—she was now a cook. In a very official tone she said:

"Permit me to speak to you. We who are working in the kitchen request you to take a personal interest in our future."

"What do you mean?" asked Danilov. "Do you want me to find husbands for you, or what?"

Fima half turned away to smile politely at the jest. Then she explained.

"Here in the train we've acquired new qualifications and after the war we want to find work where we can use them. Olya and Katya—what do you think?—they can quite well be cooks in a public canteen, I've taught them. And I. ..." Fima blushed slightly. "I, Ivan Egorych, would like to be chef or maître d'hotel in some good restaurant."

The words she was using—maître d'hotel. ... Well, why not, good girl.

"That's a good idea of yours," said Danilov. "I'll try to help you. ... In any case, you'll get a testimonial."

"Ivan Egorych, what good is a testimonial? That's all right, of course, but if you'd do something about it officially in an organized way?"

"I'll try," he repeated.

When she had gone, he began to think. Fima was right. He ought to fix up his people in civilian life in places that they deserved. There were people, of course, who did not need it—the doctors, for instance, Julia Dmitriyevna, Lena Ogorodnikova, he himself, Danilov. But what about Sister Smirnova, Klava Mukhina—weren't they fit to work in some large, model hospital? Sobol could be director of a farm attached to some factory, Vaska ... Vaska could go anywhere ... a collective farm, a hospital—she'd do splendidly anywhere. He'd hand her over to Julia Dmitriyevna—a woman with no children, let her teach a clever girl her way about. ... It would be fine if they could all keep in touch after the war. After travelling together for only four days, people sometimes 'phone each other, and here they had been travelling for nearly four years, not as passengers but working together.

He had been thinking that the kitchen girls had minds as empty as their caps, yet this was what they had been whispering about in the evenings—the future, what they would be in civilian life.

And what would he himself be in civilian life? There'd

be enough to do, plenty. Only at home he'd have to organize life properly, not as it had been, not as it had been.

Soon he would be seeing his son.

In a moment he would be seeing his son.

Danilov was walking along the broad street, like a desert, on the outskirts of the town. It was over a year since he had been there.

A spotted cow dawdled slowly along, with an old woman moving still more slowly after it, carrying a branch which she used like a staff. A man in an old, greasy jacket, his heels rapping smartly on the wooden pavement, overtook Danilov and turned to glance at him—a stranger. Along the ditches beside the narrow wooden pavement the ground had been dug for potatoes.

It was like a village. The pavements had not been repaired, in many places the boards had rotted, and the houses looked neglected. His house would look the same, of course, the Trust would hardly have been able to do any repairs the previous year, and Dusya would scarcely have done anything about it. Neither she nor the Trust had time or attention for that.

All these years she had lived alone, without him—lived honestly, he had no doubt about that, selflessly and modestly. And he had thought about her so seldom, he had hardly ever written to her. ...

There were children playing in the neighbours' yards. His son was not among them. Whose children were they? There was a little girl, dark as a gipsy, surely he had seen her before. They had all grown, he could not recognize them. ...

The gate.

The gate was locked, but he knew the secret—he must thrust his hand in between the boards of the fence and draw the wooden bolt. He did so, and entered the yard.

There was nobody there. Danilov looked about him—orderly vegetable beds, dug and raked, young grass

beside them, the path, the porch; a padlock hanging on the door.

A padlock?

For some reason, it had never entered his head that he might find that, though it was natural enough since he had not warned anybody of his arrival. But his spirits fell.

A padlock, indeed!

He stood there for a moment. Before the war, when Dusya went out, she used to put the key under the floor of the porch in case he should arrive before she returned. Standing on the bottom step he fumbled about under the porch, felt the once-familiar sensation of damp moss. ... The key was there, in its old place, in the crack between two bricks.

This little domestic secret was like a greeting from an old friend.

Danilov opened the door and entered his home.

He stood in the small kitchen. Everything was in its old place—the table, the pot with the aloe, the bread mixing trough covered with a rough towel. It was darker in the room than it had been outside, and Danilov's eye picked out the objects one after the other.

On the table with its white oilcloth stood a glass jar with sugar. There was an egg-shell on a saucer. The oilcloth was old, the corners were rubbed—it had been quite new when Danilov had left for the war. There were inkspots on it—where did they come from? Ah, yes, his son could write now. He had grown, and was writing with ink.

Danilov closed his eyes. When he opened them again, they were wet.

He swallowed a heavy, sweet lump in his throat and laughed—his son had grown and was writing in ink!

Danilov went into the next room. Here too everything was in its place, but there was not that shining cleanliness, that order and tidiness to which he was accustomed. Instead of the white quilt, the bed was covered with a rough grey blanket. Beside the sewing machine on the

THE TRAIN

table was a half-mended child's stocking, stretched over a wooden spoon. In the corner was a child's tricycle, with one pedal broken. ... There was no sense in mending it, his son had grown, now he would need a bicycle.

Danilov went out on to the porch, sat down on the step and began to smoke. He sat there smoking and thinking with nobody to disturb him, nobody to distract his attention. Slowly, serenely, he thought of Dusya, of his wife ... thought of her with gratitude, almost with tenderness. A star winked faintly in the tender sky. A freshness rose from the earth ... Dusya's voice sounded from the street. Panting slightly, she was saying angrily:

"If you'd been a good boy, you'd have told him: 'Don't teach me a lot of foolishness, Uncle, I don't need a catapult, and you'd do better to go to work, instead of teaching boys to be naughty.'"

Danilov did not go to meet them, he sat there on the step, his arms round his knees.

The boy was the first to run in through the gate. Dusya followed him, a heavy sack on her back. The lad saw the man sitting on the step and slowed down to a walk, then slower still, he stopped, laughed and said with embarrassment:

"Daddy. ..."

He had grown tall and thin, he was sunburned, and he had no front teeth.

Dusya gasped, dropped the sack and sat down on it, as though she had no strength to go any further.

Danilov rose, embraced his son and kissed his cropped head. Then he went to his wife.

"Get up," he said. She rose, he picked up the sack and carried it into the kitchen, followed by his wife. Silently, with trembling hands she took the shawl from her head and tidied her hair.

Danilov pressed the switch, the light went on and illuminated the happy face of his son and the aged one of his wife.

And Danilov said—tenderly, repentantly and wearily:
"Well, tell me how you've been getting on. ..."

